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ABSTRACT

This story, one of three in The Sexuality Decision-Making Series for Teens, contains several different possible plot lines depending on the decisions the reader makes for the characters at various "choice points." The study focuses on the theme of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs): Tracy and Tom have been in love for a year, and they have sexual feelings they can no longer ignore. The story shows decisions involved in talking about sex and using protection. It explains that, as a result of some of his choices, Tom gets a sexually transmitted disease and must face the consequences--telling his partner, finding help, or getting treated. Told primarily from the boy's point of view, the story models abstinence as a preferred method for preventing STD, but for sexually active adolescents, the use of condoms is recommended. The following behaviors are modeled: ways to find out more about STD; ways to bring up the subject of sex, diseases, and/or condoms before getting into a romantic situation; ways to say no to pressure for sex, or for sex without protection, even in a situation that has gone far; ways to bring up the subject and talk to parents about STD; ways to tell your partner you no longer want to have sex; ways to positively express values and concerns about STD despite peer pressure; ways for both partners to share responsibility for protection; ways to insist on using condoms even if the partner is resistant; and ways to overcome fear or embarrassment about going to a clinic or buying condoms. (TE)

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Tom and Tracy are facing the ...alities of ...xually ...nsmitted ...ease. What ...ll they do? ...up to you.

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Don't Let It Get Around

Don't Let It Get Around

Christine DeVault

Illustrated by Ian Akin

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The Sexuality Decision-Making Series for Teens

by Christine DeVault

Too Soon for Sex?
Abstinence

Taking Chances with Sex
Birth Control

Don't Let It Get Around
Sexually Transmitted Disease

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Publisher's Note

Some of the material in this publication is controversial, due to the nature of the subject matter covered. This book was developed with the specific intent of influencing adolescent sexual behaviors. Therefore, it may be most appropriate for use in communities in which there are high rates of teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease or substance use. In addition, the laws related to teaching sensitive topics in the classroom vary throughout the country and will have an effect on what may be taught and how it is presented. We recommend that teachers understand district policies and state mandates and obtain parental, school board and administrative support before using the material.

Don't Let It Get Around is a story in which you get to make choices for the characters.

It works like this:

You meet Tom and Tracy. They've been dating for nearly a year when they choose to become sexually involved. Their decision brings them face-to-face with a series of dilemmas about what can happen if they don't protect themselves from sexually transmitted disease. Each time they have to make a choice, you step in and make it for them.

Your choice takes you to a different part of the book, where you'll discover the outcome of your decision. You continue to make choices as you read, until you reach the end. When you finish, go back and make different choices. There are many stories in the same book.

You become part of this story as you make choices for Tom and Tracy.

1

Rosemont High's future looked grim. With only a minute and a half left in the game, they trailed Valley 20 to 21. Worse yet, Valley had the ball on Rosemont's 45 yard line and was steadily advancing down the field. It was their second down, with four yards to go for a first.

Don't think about the future, Tom Johnson told himself. Think about what's happening NOW. Keep your eyes open and MOVE. Waiting for Valley's center to hike the ball, he glared at the tackle in the line across from him. You're not even there, he thought. I'm gonna go right through you—

His thought was cut off as, from the corner of his eye, he saw the snap. He propelled himself forward. He heard the crunch of helmets and something tugged at his jersey, but he kept going.

Tom was through the line and still on his feet.

Now his mind was racing ahead. Glancing to his right he saw the hand-off from Valley's quarterback to the halfback. The halfback started forward and the space between them narrowed. There was no one between them—nothing but a few feet of green grass. I guess you're all mine, Tom thought. But where is everybody? Where's Zack? Where's my guard?

As Tom set up for the tackle, the big running back finally seemed to notice him. He dodged to his left, but it was too late. Tom was already launched. Just before he connected with what felt like 200 pounds of solid concrete, he punched upward toward the football clutched between the halfback's beefy hands.

He thought he'd touched the ball, but he couldn't tell if he'd dislodged it or not. He couldn't tell much with the wind knocked out of him and his face buried in the grass. In addition, someone was lying across his legs.

Tom struggled to lift his head. He saw the ball flopping crazily on the ground and a blur of red beside it. Zack! he thought. There you are! Then the red blur was covered by a landslide of blue.

Tom watched the Valley players slowly peel off the pile. Sure enough, there was Zack at the bottom, and under him, the football.

As he staggered to his feet Tom could hear the

He punched upward toward the football clutched between the halfback's beefy hands.

growl of the crowd turn to a roar. He stumbled over to Zack and helped him up. Zack waved the ball over his head before tossing it to the referee.

"Where were you anyway?" Tom demanded, grinning at his best friend. "I thought you were supposed to be my guard."

"Gee, I'm sorry," Zack said with his lopsided smile. "I guess you didn't know I was right behind you. In fact, I think I scared the big fella into dropping the ball on you."

Coach Crowley called a time out. "Okay," he told the Rosemont team, "it's time to play some serious ball."

Now that they had the ball, Rosemont seemed determined not to let it go. They fought their way up the field to Valley's 25 yard line. By that time only six seconds remained in the game.

The coach called the final time out and sent in the kicking team. The crowd was silent as the kicker, Danny Velásquez, prepared to take the hike. Tom closed his eyes briefly. "Go Danny," he whispered. He opened them to see the most beautiful sight in the world: the football, tumbling like a miniature satellite through the space between the uprights.

There were still two seconds remaining. As he watched the players go through the motions of the final kick-off, Tom felt himself beginning to

relax. He took off his helmet and rubbed his head, tousling his sweaty, sand-colored hair. I hope Mom and Dad were watching when I made that tackle, he thought. I hope Tracy was too.

Above him, in the stands, Tracy Carter could barely contain herself. She jumped and cheered and hugged her friends Christy and Serena until they protested.

"Talk about school spirit," said Serena shaking her head.

"That's not school spirit," said Christy. "It's Tom spirit."

Tracy laughed with her friends. I really am lucky, she thought. He's such a special guy. She smiled to herself, remembering how reluctant she'd been to go out with him last year when he'd started showing interest in her. At that time, she didn't want to go out with anyone at all; she was still getting over a painful relationship with someone who had left her after taking advantage of her inexperience and trusting nature.

But Tom's patience and good humor had won her over. Now, in their senior year, they were together as often as possible. They'd found many common interests, especially sports and any activity that took them out of doors. And their personalities complemented each other—Tracy's usual reserve and calmness balanced by Tom's

casual, outgoing attitude.

Tom emerged from the gymnasium into a jubilant crowd of students, parents, teachers and other well-wishers. He caught sight of Tracy standing with his parents and his younger brother, Travis. She waited patiently while his family hugged him and pounded him on the back. Then she slipped forward and hugged him tightly. "You were great," she said.

"Thanks." He put an arm around her shoulders and held her against his chest for a moment. "Did you get the car tonight?"

"No, I came with Serena and Christy, but they already left. They're saving us a table at Geno's."

Tom nodded. "Okay. Let's drop my folks off at home then, and get on over there." He looked at his parents. "Is that all right?"

"Naturally," replied Mr. Johnson. "Isn't that what parents are for? You spend seventeen years of back-breaking labor to provide a decent life for your kids and they can't wait to get rid of you and take off with the family car." He rolled his eyes, but he was smiling.

Tom laughed and put his other arm around his dad. "Tough life, isn't it?" he said.

7

As they made their way through the crowd, Tom accepted the congratulations of the fans and exchanged good-natured insults with his teammates. "See you at Geno's," he said.

Geno's pizza parlor was filled with laughter, noise and good smells when Tom and Tracy arrived. They spotted Christy waving at them through the crowd.

"I saved you a place," she said when they had fought their way to the table. "Sort of."

Tom and Tracy squeezed into the booth with Christy, Serena, Zack and Zack's girlfriend Nicole.

"I don't know how James is going to fit in here if he comes," said Serena with a laugh.

"I didn't know James was coming home," Zack said. "That's cool."

"I hope he makes it soon," said Serena. "He wanted to get here in time for the game, but he had a late class to go to."

"How's he doing in college, anyway?" Nicole wanted to know. "Does he like going to State?"

"You can ask him yourself," Tom said. "Here's the college man in person."

"Hey, Tom, Zack, how you doin'?" James

shook hands with the guys. He leaned over the table and kissed Serena's cheek. "Hi, babe. I finally got here. Hi, Christy, Nicole."

There were a few moments of scuffling and confusion while they rearranged themselves to make room for James. Zack sat on the outside end of the booth with Nicole on his knees.

"Just don't move suddenly," she warned, "or I'll be on the floor."

"So how was the game?" James asked. "I hear we won."

"Yeah, we won," Christy said, "but just by two points. I was getting worried for a while there."

"But it was a good game," Tracy said.

"We've played better," Tom said. "We made a couple of stupid mistakes."

"Yeah," Zack said, "I thought our quarterback was brain dead for a while."

"You didn't look so great yourself in the second quarter. You spent most of your time lying on the field, being a nice soft cushion for Valley to run over."

"At least I was playing football. What were you doing? Knitting?"

"One of these days I'm gonna knit your nose." Tom showed Zack his fist and his friends broke up with laughter.

"We did good, Johnson, didn't we?" he said. "And what about that squirt Velásquez? What a toe he's got."

"Hey," James protested, "let's start at the beginning. Who kicked off?"

"Wait a second, wait a second," Christy interrupted. "I'm starving. Can we order first?"

"Good idea," said Tracy. "What does everybody want?"

It took a few minutes for everyone to decide. Christy went to the counter to place the order. "Come on you two," she said to Zack and Nicole. "You're sitting on the end anyway. Help me carry the drinks."

Tracy, Tom, Serena and James took advantage of the extra space in the booth to stretch their arms and legs.

"Enjoy it while it lasts," Tom said. "They'll be back in a minute."

James looked over at Tracy. "How're you and Christy doing in track? Setting any cross-country records?"

"Not yet," said Tracy, "but we're working on it. Christy's running really great this year."

"So are you," said Tom.

James turned to Tom. "So how are you doing? You been working out or something? You look good."

Tom looked pleased. "A little. I feel pretty good."

"So what else is happening? How's school?"

"Not bad. Actually...I wanted to ask you about something."

"What's that?"

"Well, I'm thinking maybe of applying to State U. too, and I wanted to talk to you about it sometime. If that's okay."

"Sure. When do you want to get together?"

"I don't know. Some weekend when you're home."

"Okay. Just call my dad, or you can check with Serena to see if I'm gonna be here."

"That'll be gr—"

"We're back," Christy announced, setting a pitcher of soda in front of them.

"We noticed," said Tom.

Zack and Nicole brought another pitcher, glasses, napkins and straws. "Scoot over," said Zack. "I'm ready to sit down and tell James what really happened out there tonight."

Tom and Tracy left the restaurant a little after 11:00. The brisk fall night was a refreshing contrast to the restaurant's stuffy warmth. They both

inhaled gratefully as they walked to the car.

Tom drove slowly, enjoying the pleasures of the evening: the victory on the football field, the company of friends, the good food, and the special girl by his side. Tom glanced at Tracy and felt a wave of love for her.

Although they'd been going out for almost a year, it had been only in the last two or three months that Tom felt he'd managed to win Tracy's trust. After the painful breakup with her previous boyfriend she'd been nervous about getting close to anyone.

But now things have worked out just fine, he thought. There's hardly anything else I'd ask for...except my own car, of course... and... well.... He glanced at Tracy again. This time she caught his eye and smiled.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said.

Tom chuckled. I bet she wouldn't give me a penny if she knew my thoughts were X-rated.

"Well?" She was looking at him from the corner of her eye, her head tilted to one side.

Who knows? he thought. Maybe she has those thoughts too. I sure wish I knew. "I was just thinking how much I love you," he said.

It felt good to love someone, Tom thought. And to be loved back. He'd had girlfriends before Tracy, but he'd never been as happy as he

was now. Still, sometimes he wished they could be closer....

A few minutes later he pulled to the side of the curb and switched off the engine. This was a favorite place of Tom and Tracy's, just half a block from her house in a spot where shade trees provided shelter from the streetlight's glare. As Tom turned and reached out to touch Tracy, she leaned toward him and pulled him closer.

After a while, Tracy broke the spell. She pushed herself away from Tom and looked into his eyes. "Time to come up for air," she said. "It's getting late."

Tom searched her face longingly, wanting more and yet knowing it wasn't possible. Or was it? I wish I knew what she was thinking, he thought. I wish I had the nerve to ask her. We get so close and it feels so good. Sighing, he straightened up behind the wheel and reached for the ignition.

At Tracy's house, he walked her to the door, kissed her briefly and sprinted back down the path to the car.

Later as he was falling asleep, images of Tracy crowded his mind: her long hair, her smooth skin, her shining, dark eyes. He wished she wasn't going away with her family for the weekend. That meant he wouldn't see her until school on Monday.

13

When Tom arrived in health class, Tracy and Christy were already there, seated side by side.

"Here, I saved you a place," said Tracy, removing her books from the desk behind her. The bell rang as he slipped into the seat.

"Good morning, everyone," said Mrs. Diaz. "I hope you all had a great weekend and are ready to go to work. We have a lot of material to cover. If you look at the class outline, you'll see that our subject this week is sexually transmitted disease."

There were muffled moans and cries of "Oh no" from the class.

The teacher looked at them sternly. "Now, before we see the film, let's talk a little about *who* gets sexually transmitted diseases—or STDs as we call them for short. What kind of people do you think are most likely to get STDs?"

"Sleazes," was one suggestion. Others followed:

"Prostitutes."

"Stupid people."

"People who sleep around."

"Dirty people."

"Any more ideas?" the teacher asked.

Tracy timidly raised her hand. "People who

have sex?" she suggested.

Mrs. Diaz nodded. "That's right. The people who get STDs are people who have sex—any kind of people: young, old, rich, poor, well-educated or not. Anyone who has sex and doesn't take precautions can get an STD. In fact, after the common cold, the most likely disease a sexually-active teenager will get is an STD. You see, germs don't know who you are and they don't care who they infect. The crucial factor is *protection*. Any one, even you, can get an STD, *if* you have sex and *if* you don't take precautions."

The class was unusually silent as they digested this new information.

"We'll watch the film now," the teacher said. "It describes the most common STDs, which are herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital warts and AIDS. Tomorrow we'll talk more about the various diseases and the rest of the week we'll deal with prevention." She smiled. "That's the good news, you know. STDs *can* be prevented. Will someone turn out the lights, please?"

"What did you think about that movie?" asked Christy before she pulled her sweatshirt down over her head. "Was it scary enough for you?"

"Yeah," Tracy nodded slowly. "It sure makes you stop and think." She banged her gym locker shut. "C'mon, let's hit the track."

With the rest of the cross-country team, Tracy and Christy headed across the football field and off the school grounds. They jogged two blocks to Garden Street Park and then pounded down the trail that wound among the maples and alders. Tracy smiled at the trees, ablaze in their autumn glory.

"It looks beautiful, doesn't it?" Christy said. She sniffed the air appreciatively. "Smells like it's going to rain."

They ran for a while without talking. After a few minutes Tracy spoke. "Chris?"

"Mm."

"Can I ask you something?"

Christy looked at her friend curiously. "Sure, go ahead."

"I was wondering, if you...well, if you miss making love with David. I mean, I know you miss him, but...how important is the other part?"

"I never thought about it like that," Christy replied. "I guess I don't separate the two things in my mind. For me, part of being in love with David is making love."

"Sometimes when I'm with Tom, I feel like that. Or I mean I think I'd feel like that if we

went ahead and made love. But other times I remember how it was with Vince.... I think that whenever we were making love I was thinking how much I loved him and he was thinking about—I don't know—he was probably thinking about Cyndi or Yvonne or somebody. So then I think it's better just to leave sex out of it. Then you know the guy likes you for who you are—not just for what he can get from you."

"Sounds like you're still bitter about Vincent."

"Yeah. I guess."

"But Tom's not like that. You must know that by now."

"I know it in my head...but my heart just can't seem to accept it."

They ran silently for a while.

"Well, it seems to work for Serena and James," Christy said.

"What works for Serena and James?"

"Not having sex. They've been together a long time."

"Yeah. Maybe I should talk to Serena. I feel like Tom and I are going to have to make a decision soon, and I just don't know what to do. I need all the help I can get."

"I just have one piece of friendly advice," Christy said. "And you better take it, Tracy, or I'll wring your neck."

"What is it?"

"Just be sure you don't do anything you don't really want to do."

Tracy flashed her a grin. "Okay. Thanks.... We're coming down the home stretch now. Let's stop talking and start running." She stretched her legs into a swift lope that threatened to leave Christy in the dust. "See you at the gym."

"Oh no you don't," shouted Christy. "You're not as hot as you think."

Five minutes later, laughing, perspiring and gasping for air, Tracy and Christy arrived back at the gym.

"Way to go," said Tracy.

"Give me a high five," said Christy.

The following Sunday, Tom and Tracy took their dogs, Boy and Muffin, to run in the park. They also took their sisters: Tom's sister Jennifer, who was 12, and Tracy's sister, 11-year-old Tanya.

"Hey, let's put the leashes on the girls," Tom teased as they walked toward the park. "The dogs are much better behaved."

"Ha, ha," said Jennifer. "The only thing funny about you is your face."

Tanya giggled in appreciation of her friend's joke.

"C'mon, Tom," said Tracy. "Pick on someone your own size."

"Like you for instance?" He lowered his shoulder and lunged at her, attempting to scoop her off her feet.

She sidestepped the attack and took off at top speed. Tom caught up with her in the next block, but she turned to face him and danced away from his outstretched hands.

By the time they reached the park they were out of breath and they collapsed on the grass. Tom bent over Tracy and was about to kiss her laughing mouth when the girls and dogs arrived.

"Oh, look! They're kissing," announced Tanya.

"I don't see how anybody could kiss my brother," Jennifer added.

"Why don't you take the dogs down to the duck pond?" Tracy suggested.

"Yeah, and jump in," said Tom. "Just kidding, Jenny. Just kidding!" He curled up defensively as his sister flung herself at him.

She gave his arm and shoulder a couple of solid punches and then seemed satisfied. "Bye, Tracy," she said, dusting her hands on her jacket and following Tanya and the dogs down the path to the pond.

19

Tracy lay back and watched the fat clouds piling onto each other over the treetops.

"Now where were we?" said Tom leaning over her. "Here, I think."

She put her arms around his neck and drew him closer. "I love you so much," she said.

After a while, they got up and walked hand in hand to the duck pond to see what their sisters were up to.

Tom watched Tracy from the corner of his eye as they walked. I wonder what she's thinking, he thought. I wonder if she wants me as much as I want her. Will we make love soon? Should I get some condoms? What does she expect?

This would be a perfect time to talk about those things, Tom thought. We're alone and we have lots of time. But maybe she'll think I'm rushing things. What should I do?

"I love you so much," she said.

What did Tom do?

Choice Point 1A

If you think Tom decided
to talk with Tracy
about being prepared for sex

turn to page 22.

Choice Point 1B

If you think Tom decided
not to talk to Tracy

turn to page 24.

continued from p. 21

"Uh, Tracy," Tom began as they walked along the path toward the duck pond.

"Mmm?"

"I've been meaning to ask you: What do you think about health class?"

She looked at him, her eyebrows slightly raised. "Health? I think it's a good class."

"I mean...well, I was thinking, more along the lines of what do you think about it *personally*. Like if it applies to *you*."

"Well, some of it does, sure. I'm not sure the part we're doing now applies though. I'm not planning to go out and get herpes or anything."

"You're not? I mean of course you're not. But don't you think you might...well, find yourself in a position where you would want to know some of that information?" Tom hoped he wasn't blushing.

Tracy gave him a sidelong glance. "Sure I think about that. I mean, well *if* I were going to have sex, of course I'd want to be protected."

"If?"

"If," she said firmly, but she looked at him with a definite twinkle in her eye.

He put out his arm and stopped her. "Tracy." He tilted up her chin. "I don't want to wait any-

more. I think we're ready."

She saw the tenderness in his eyes and felt her own longing. "I know. I feel the same way... but...."

"But what?"

"It's so scary."

"It's scary for me too, Tracy. I love you so much. I want everything to be perfect. I don't want to do anything to hurt our relationship.... But I don't think it will. I think we'll be even closer."

"I hope you're right," she said. "More than anything."

One week after their conversation in the park, Tom and Tracy made love. They continued to do so whenever they had the chance, which wasn't often as they were both busy with school, sports, friends and family. Also, it wasn't easy to find privacy.

Tom bought condoms and they used them every time they had sex. Using them was awkward at first but they found they could laugh at their embarrassment and get over it.

Turn to page 43.

continued from p. 21

Maybe later, Tom said to himself. They met the girls at the pond and joined them in throwing sticks for Boy and Muffin. Then Tracy had to leave. She'd promised her mother they'd be back by 4:00.

"Can Jennifer come home with us?" Tanya begged. "I know Mom won't mind."

"It's all right with me," Tracy said. "What do you think, Tom?"

"I'll give you five dollars to take her," he said.

Jennifer turned to Tanya. "You're lucky you don't have brothers," she said.

As Tom jogged home with Boy scampering beside him, he gave himself a few swift mental kicks. I should've said something to her, he thought. Who knows when the next chance will be?

In health class, they continued to learn about sexually transmitted diseases. The number of STDs was alarming: herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital warts, AIDS, and more. It was somewhat reassuring to learn that *most* STDs are curable and will do no permanent damage

provided you get treatment right away. And that they can be prevented.

The most frightening STD was AIDS—because there's no cure for it. Mrs. Diaz explained that AIDS is different from other STDs. The AIDS virus is carried mainly in semen and blood. So the virus can be passed during sex and also by injecting drugs with a needle that's been used by someone with AIDS. And if a pregnant woman has AIDS, there's a good chance her baby will have it, too.

The other STDs weren't as serious, but they were bad enough. The symptoms seemed scary—things like sores on your genitals, a discharge from your vagina or penis, or a painful feeling when you go to the bathroom. And what was even scarier was that sometimes you could have a disease with *no* symptoms, so it could be damaging your body or you could be giving it to someone else and you wouldn't even know it.

"Now that we've talked about some of the STDs," Mrs. Diaz said, "let's talk about how *not* to become personally acquainted with them." The class offered suggestions.

"Use birth control."

"Wash after sex."

"Just have one girlfriend or boyfriend."

"Don't have sex at all."

That one broke the class up, but their teacher said, "Actually, out of all the suggestions, the last one is the only sure way to prevent STDs—and pregnancy, incidentally. Abstinence is a foolproof method of protection from STDs. Think about it carefully. When you consider the risks, it might be worth waiting to have sex—or taking a break for a while if you've already started."

Tom thought the last suggestion sounded a little extreme, but he noticed several people nodding their heads in agreement.

"Let's discuss the other methods that were suggested," Mrs. Diaz said. "Someone said 'Use birth control.' What's wrong with that as a way to prevent STDs?"

The class was silent for a few moments, then someone spoke up: "They didn't say which method of birth control."

"Exactly," said the teacher. "Some methods may help prevent STDs, but others are totally useless for that purpose. To stop bacteria or viruses or other organisms from getting from one body to another we have to put a physical barrier between the bodies. That's why condoms provide the best protection if they're used correctly every time—and that's why birth control pills have no effect at all when it comes to STD prevention.

"Another thing that helps is spermicide—a foam or gel that kills sperm—because it also kills many kinds of disease-carrying organisms. Some condoms are already treated with a spermicide. It's called nonoxynol-9 and it will say so right on the condom package. There's also spermicidal foam that's placed in the vagina and can be used with a condom. These two things together—condoms and spermicide—provide the best protection you can get—except for the one sure method...and what's that?"

"Not doing it at all," someone called out.

"Right. Abstinence. Okay, let's talk about some of those other 'methods' that were suggested. What about washing—good old soap and water—as a method of disease prevention?"

"I don't see why it wouldn't work," one girl said. "Washing gets germs off your hands."

"Washing gets *some* germs off your hands. But ordinary soap doesn't kill all disease-carrying organisms. And hands are different than genitals. Many of these organisms live inside the reproductive or urinary tract so you can't get at them. And even the ones on the skin's surface have lots of creases and folds to hide in. Now I don't have anything against washing—basic cleanliness is certainly desirable—but it has very little to do with STDs."

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"What if you know your girlfriend doesn't have anything and you know you don't have anything—wouldn't you be safe then?" a boy wanted to know.

"Theoretically you would be," said Mrs. Diaz. "But in real life there's a problem with this kind of thinking. Anyone know what it is?"

"How can you be sure she doesn't have something?" was one male student's response.

"How can you be sure *he* doesn't?" shot back a female student.

"Exactly." Mrs. Diaz went to the board and drew a diagram. "When you have sex with someone, in a way it's like you're having sex with every person your partner ever had sex with and every person those people had sex with and so on and on and on." She drew stick figures to represent possible sex partners going back a year or two in time. Pretty soon the board was covered with them. "So you see that even if your partner only had sex with one or two partners before you, if those partners had partners and the partners' partners had partners, you could wind up with diseases from hundreds of people in *your* body—even though you'd never had sex with anyone else at all!"

When the moans and groans had died down, someone asked, "What if you're both virgins

when you start having sex and you don't use drugs?"

"What do you think?" Mrs. Diaz asked the class.

"Then you'd be safe as long as nobody cheated," someone suggested. Other opinions rapidly followed:

"But could you be *absolutely* sure the person was a virgin?"

"Well, you have to trust people sometime."

"But is it worth risking your health—or even your life?"

"Plus, you'd have to trust that they didn't cheat on you."

"Well, I still think it's possible," protested the boy who'd originally suggested the idea.

"I agree that it's *possible*," their teacher said. "But each individual has to weigh the risks for him or herself. Each of you has to decide if the risk is worth it. Remember, you're betting your health and—as one of you mentioned—possibly even your life."

On that dramatic note, the bell rang. "See you next week, class," Mrs. Diaz said. "We're going to talk about how to tell if you have an STD and what to do about it."

"Well, that was disgusting enough for one day," Tracy said to Tom as they gathered up their books.

"For sure," he agreed. "Am I going to see you later?"

"Maybe when I'm done with practice?"

"Okay.... Wait a minute.... No, I forgot. We're playing at Richmond High this afternoon. We have to take the bus early. How about tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow we have an out-of-town meet. I guess I'll be gone most of the day. And tomorrow night's out. I promised my mom's friends I'd baby-sit—it's their anniversary."

"Should I take a number or what?"

"Hey, don't be such a grouch. How about Sunday?"

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure. I'll call you Sunday morning and we can figure out something to do, okay? I've got to run or I'll be late for chemistry. Bye."

"Okay, see you later," Tom said to her back as she disappeared down the hall.

⊠ ⊠ ⊠

Tom slept late on Saturday. When he got up he watched cartoons with Jennifer and ate three bowls of cereal. Then he rinsed out the bowl and put it in the sink. He was staring out the window when his mother came in.

"If you're bored," she said, "you could do the rest of those dishes."

"Or," said his dad as he joined them, "you could help me clean out the rain gutters up on the roof."

"Uh...actually," said Tom, "I was planning to go over to Zack's."

His parents just looked at him. "Okay, okay, don't say another word. I'll help Dad, all right? Just let me go call Zack first."

I guess I didn't move fast enough, he thought as he picked up the phone.

As it turned out, Zack was helping *his* dad clean out the garage. "But you're welcome to join us," Zack said.

"Okay. I'll see how long this takes. Maybe I'll be by later."

Although the day was cool, it was sunny and the view from the roof was sensational. Cleaning the gutters didn't take as long as he'd expected and Tom was soon on his way to Zack's.

He found his friend staggering out of the garage under a load of newspapers. "We have to make a trip to the recycling center," he explained, unloading the papers at the driveway's edge. "But my dad had to take the pickup. He just remembered he had to go get some building supplies."

"So are we just piling everything out here?"

"More or less. We've got to sort through it first though."

"I see what you mean." Tom looked around at the array of bottles, cans, magazines, newspapers, boxes, broken flower pots, bicycles and bike parts, roller skates, fishing gear, garden tools, bird cages, fish tanks and baby furniture that covered most of the available surfaces in the garage.

"My folks like to save stuff," Zack remarked, "in case they need it someday."

The boys worked silently, stopping every once in a while to trade friendly insults.

"By the way," Zack asked, when they stopped to have a cold drink, "what are you doing tonight?"

"Not much, I guess."

"Why? Tracy mad at you?"

"No, nothing like that. She's gotta baby-sit."

"Tough luck."

"Why'd you ask?"

"Me and Nicole are going to do something. Go to the movies or maybe go skating. I thought you might want to come along."

"Sorry. Some other time."

"Yeah. Oh well." Zack took a long drink. "Uh...there's something else, too. I hope you don't think it's too weird."

"What's that?"

"I was wondering if you had a...um...a rubber on you."

Tom grinned. "Gosh, now, Zack. I don't think I do at the moment. How come you want one?"

Zack's ears began to turn bright pink. "Just forget I asked," he said.

"Aww, come on, man. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to give you a hard time. I'm probably just jealous 'cause I don't have a date."

"I guess I'll have to stop by a store. See, Nicole's mom will be going out later, so we thought we'd get back to her place kind of early, and who knows...?"

"Lucky you." Tom swirled his soda around in the can. "But don't you...isn't it embarrassing, all you have to go through to use a condom?"

Zack nodded. "Why do you think I asked you if you had one? I hate to buy them, but Nicole insists. I'm gonna buy a supply next time."

"Then maybe I can borrow from you," Tom said with a short laugh.

"You don't have any at home either?"

"No...we...well, we haven't really needed them."

"What do you mean? You and Tracy haven't had sex?"

"Well, not exactly. But I think we're getting

close." He hoped he didn't sound dumb.

"Oh. Sorry, I didn't mean to pry into your business. I just figured that after all this time...."

"Yeah, I know. But Tracy's the kind of person who takes things real slow."

Zack nodded. He crunched his empty can in one hand. "My old man's gonna think I'm taking this job real slow if we don't get back to work," he said.

The shrill, insistent ring of the telephone dragged Tom from his Sunday morning slumbers. He staggered out of bed to the hall.

"Hello?"

"Tom. Is that you?"

"Yeah, hi, Trace. What time is it? What day is it? Where am I?"

"It's 11 o'clock on Sunday morning. I don't know where you are. Outer space it sounds like."

"I guess. I stayed up real late watching this stupid movie about giant potato bugs. Then I went to bed and dreamed about 'em."

"Yuck. Well, what do you want to do today?"

"I dunno. I can't think yet. Do you want to come over? We can decide then."

"I guess that's okay. Should I bring Muffin?"

"Sure. The more the merrier."

"Okay. See you soon."

Tom went back to his room and put on his sweat pants. Then he wandered into the kitchen. It's awful quiet around here, he thought. Where is everyone? He got some juice from the refrigerator. When he was pouring it, he spied a note on the kitchen counter: "Tom—we all took off for the flea market. Then we're going to the fall carnival at Jenny's school. We'll be back around 4:00. Be good. Love, Mom and Dad."

"All right!" said Tom. He was eating toast and peanut butter when Tracy arrived twenty minutes later. They put Muffin in the back yard with Boy, and Tracy joined him at the table.

"You hungry? Want some toast?"

"No, thanks. I ate already."

"Here. Check this out." He handed her the note.

She smiled. "Hmmm."

"The possibilities are interesting, aren't they?" He swallowed the last bite of toast. "Come over here and let's discuss them."

She came around the table to sit on his lap. "You have peanut butter breath."

"Good thing you like peanut butter."

The kiss was slow and warm and soon led to another one.

Tracy let her lips trail down to Tom's bare

shoulder. "Did you forget to put your shirt on?"

"I just didn't get around to it yet. Besides I'm not going anywhere, am I?"

"Aren't you?" She gave him a look that Tom thought would have made him weak in the knees if he'd been standing up.

He kissed her again and fiddled with the top button on her shirt. Then he moved to the other buttons. "Listen," he murmured against her skin, "I've got a great idea. Why don't we go to the bedroom?"

"Okay," Tracy whispered. Hand in hand they made their way down the hall.

On Tom's warm and rumpled bed, he suddenly began to have second thoughts.

Now what? he asked himself. I don't want to stop, but I know we should use a condom. Why didn't I talk to Tracy when I had the chance? Why didn't I buy some condoms? What will she think if I stop now? I guess we could stop, go buy some, and come back and start over. Should I say something? Anyway, this is just one time—we can be careful *next* time.

Tom knew he had to make up his mind quickly because soon it was going to be too late.

What did Tom do?

Choice Point 2A

If you think Tom decided
to go ahead and make love
without a condom

turn to page 38.

Choice Point 2B

If you think Tom decided
to stop and talk to Tracy about protection

turn to page 39.

continued from p. 37

Tracy looked at Tom. He'd pulled away and seemed to be staring somewhere past her shoulder. I wonder what he's thinking, she thought. She knew this was an important point in their relationship. Am I ready? she'd asked herself over and over during the past few months.

I really love him. I love the way I feel with him. But...but something's wrong. He hasn't put on a condom yet. He hasn't said anything about it. It seems like time is running out.

Tracy knew she had to make a decision. If she wanted to be sure they didn't make love without protection, she had to speak up now. Not in five minutes, or even one minute. Now!

What did Tracy do?

Choice Point 3A

If you think Tracy decided **to stop and talk** with Tom about protection

turn to page 41.

Choice Point 3B

If you think Tracy decided **not to stop and talk** to Tom about protection

turn to page 50.

continued from p. 37

Tom took a deep breath. "Tracy." He shook his head to clear it.

"What ...what's wrong?" She looked alarmed.

"Don't worry. It's okay...but...we gotta talk about something."

"Oh," she said. "I know."

"What should we do?"

"Don't you have anything?"

"No. I didn't expect this to happen."

"I wish we'd thought of this earlier."

"Me too. Believe me." He sighed and flopped onto his back.

"Well, what do you want to do now?"

"I don't know. I'm not really thinking with my brain."

"Well, I think we should use something."

He nodded. "Whew! That was close. Okay, babe, how about a quick trip to the mini-market?"

She sat up and began to straighten her clothes. Tom did the same. Then they looked at each other and smiled. Tracy chuckled and they both began to laugh.

"I don't believe we're doing this," Tom gasped.

"Me either." She hiccupped. "But I'm glad we are. Besides, we did promise the dogs we'd take

them for a run."

"A quick run," Tom said. "We can be back in twenty minutes."

Turn to page 42.

continued from p. 38

"Mmph," said Tracy, twisting away from Tom's kiss.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I gotta ask you something."

"What?" I bet I know, he thought.

"Well, I probably should have said something before...but...well, have you thought about...you know...protection?"

"Oh yeah. I've thought about it."

"Well? What are we going to do about it?"

"I don't know. I don't have anything." He sighed. "I know I should. The other day I almost asked you what you thought about it, but I chickened out."

"We should have figured this out earlier," she said. "Now what?"

"Well," he said. "It's not too late."

"It's not?"

"How do you feel about a quick trip to the mini-market?"

"I don't believe this," said Tracy, beginning to laugh. But she stood up and straightened her clothes. "Come on, then. Let's go."

Turn to the next page.

continued from p. 40 or 41

In twenty-five minutes, Tom and Tracy were back. They burst into the house laughing and collapsed on the sofa.

"I don't believe what a chicken you are," Tom said.

"Cluck, cluck," replied Tracy. "No way was I going in there while you bought those. I mean maybe I could do it by myself, but I couldn't just stand there next to you with a straight face."

"Well, next time I'm gonna make *you* buy them."

"Well, okay, I will. By myself."

"You're *so* brave."

"You were pretty brave in there all alone with that fierce clerk."

"Okay, stop it now," Tom said. "I can't laugh anymore. My face hurts."

"Okay," said Tracy attempting to keep a straight face. "This is serious business, I know."

"Stop it!" Tom lunged for her and they fell back struggling and giggling onto the sofa.

Then they stopped struggling and giggling. After a few minutes, Tom said, "Do you want to try out the merchandise?"

Tracy nodded. "Let's go back to your room."

Go to the next page.

continued from p. 23 or 42

After a few weeks, however, Tracy found herself enjoying sex less. She was irritable and looked for ways to keep from being alone with Tom. It wasn't that Tom was acting differently. He was as attentive and loving as always. She wasn't sure what it was....

Serena noticed Tracy's moodiness one Saturday afternoon at the gymnasium where she taught a gymnastics class for preschoolers. The class had grown bigger than Serena could handle alone so she'd asked Tracy to help her.

"I'm a little rusty," Tracy said. "I haven't kept up much with gymnastics since I got into track."

"It's okay," Serena said. "I can do the demonstration part. I just need someone to hold their feet up and make sure they don't crash into each other."

When they were rolling up the mats after class, Serena said, "You're really quiet today."

"I am? I guess I'm just thinking."

"Anything you want to talk about?"

"Same old stuff," said Tracy with a sigh. "Men!"

"Are you and Tom having problems?" Serena said.

"Actually, Tom's fine. I think I'm the one with

the problem."

"Which is?"

"Well, you know Tom and I started having sex a few weeks ago."

Serena nodded cautiously.

"I don't know why it is, but lately it just really *bothers* me."

Serena relaxed. At least she didn't say she was pregnant, she thought. "Bothers you?"

"Yeah. I mean I like the good feelings and all that. And I love Tom and I'm glad when he's happy, but...." With a sigh she sank onto a rolled-up mat and dropped her head into her hands.

Serena nodded in sympathy. "I think I know what you mean. Sometimes it's just too much."

Tracy looked up. "But how do *you* know. I thought you and James had never.... "

Serena chuckled. "We haven't ever. And that's why. There's so much going on in our lives and the future is so important that it's just not worth the hassles and the risks."

"The weird thing is," Tracy said, "it didn't seem like a hassle with Vince. Of course, I didn't enjoy it much but it was the only thing that made me feel good—like someone cared about me. Big joke, huh?"

"Ha, ha," said Serena. "The thing is, you have so much more in your life now. You're a super

student, you're doing great in track, you'll probably get into a real good college, you're getting along with your folks, and you have a boyfriend who adores you."

Tracy nodded. "So I don't think about sex in the same way. Now it seems to take away from other things. Even my time with Tom, 'cause we're not doing other things together. We're not even talking as much. Plus we have to think about when we're going to do it, and where, and worry about if someone's going to walk in on us."

"Not to mention worrying about things like pregnancy and STDs."

"And I do worry about those things. Especially since we've been talking about them in health class. I know we're taking precautions, but I still worry. What if something goes wrong? Or what if Tom doesn't have one sometime...?"

"Easy does it," said Serena. "You're gonna give yourself a nervous breakdown with all this worrying."

"But what am I going to do Serena? We can't stop now."

"You can't?"

"Well, how can we? I mean people just don't do that."

"People do," said Serena. "There's no law against it."

In spite of herself, Tracy laughed. "Serena!"

"Think about it, Trace. And talk to Tom. He deserves to know how you're feeling. He's probably noticed you're acting strange. You could take a break for a while and see how you feel."

"I can't imagine Tom would go for it."

"He loves you, you dope. Give him a chance to prove it."

"You think he'd listen?"

"I think so. And if you don't talk to him, you'll never know."

"I guess you're right."

"Trust me. I'm right. And another thing...."

"Yes, Dear Abby?"

"Why don't you practice not saying yes."

"Huh?"

"When you mean no. It's one thing if you really want to do something—like make love. But if you don't want to, you ought to be able to refuse."

"But what reason could I give? It's all so complicated."

"That's why you need to talk to Tom. But you don't have to give a reason anyway."

"I feel like such an idiot, Serena. How do I get into these things?"

"Everyone gets into confusing situations sometimes, as far as I can tell. Everyone."

"You could take a break for a while and see how you feel."

"I guess I shouldn't feel so sorry for myself then."

"It's okay," said Serena. She shook Tracy by the shoulder. "Go on, feel as bad as you want."

Tracy grinned. "Cut it out. Anyway I feel a lot better now. I know I have a lot going for me—and friends who care about me too."

"Yeah. You're lucky your friends put up with all your crazy talk."

"My friends are lucky I put up with their smart mouths," said Tracy. "Let's get out of here. It's getting dark."

As she lay in bed that night, Tracy tried to plan what she would say to Tom, *if* she talked to him. She still wasn't sure she could work up the nerve, even though it seemed like a good idea....

What did Tracy do?

Choice Point 4A

If you think Tracy decided **to talk** to Tom about her feelings about sex

turn to page 52.

Choice Point 4B

If you think Tracy decided **not to talk** to Tom

turn to page 58.

continued from p. 38

Tracy didn't say anything about using protection that time. Nor did she say anything the next time, the time after that, or the time after that. It was easy to talk herself out of it. Besides, she thought, I haven't gotten pregnant. I haven't gotten any diseases.

Still, she knew she and Tom were taking risks. She kept hoping he'd bring out a condom at the right time or that he'd say something about it. But he didn't.

"What's the matter with you these days?" Christy demanded at cross country practice. "You seem so serious. I'm afraid you'll bite my head off if I talk to you."

"Sorry, Chris," she replied. "I guess I'm just tired." She didn't want to tell Christy what was going on because she knew what her friend would say: "What do you mean you're not using anything? Are you crazy?" In fact, Tracy thought, Christy would probably go talk to Tom herself.

I wish I could talk to someone who would just listen, she thought. Maybe someone like Mrs. Diaz would understand. I wonder if I could talk to her?

What did Tracy do?

Choice Point 5A
If you think Tracy decided **to talk** to Mrs. Diaz
turn to page 94.

Choice Point 5B
If you think Tracy decided **not to talk** to Mrs. Diaz
turn to page 124.

continued from p. 49

Tracy called Tom the next morning. "Can I come over?" she asked.

"Sure," Tom replied. "The only thing is I'm supposed to meet James around noon. We're going to go shoot some baskets."

"Oh," said Tracy. "Well, we could make it another time if you want."

"No, come on," Tom urged. "We can hang out here for a while, then you can come with us if you want."

As she rode her bike to Tom's, Tracy repeated to herself, "He loves me, he loves me, he loves me...."

"You do love me, right?" she said to Tom as soon as she was inside the door.

"Of course I love you. What's the matter?"

"Can we talk?" Tracy asked.

Tom's mom was out with Jennifer and his dad and Travis were in the kitchen whipping up a late breakfast, so they had the living room to themselves.

"I really love you, too," Tracy said. "That's why it's hard to say what I'm going to."

While Tom listened gravely, she poured out all the stored up feelings she'd told Serena about. She talked about her dreams, her worries and her fears, especially the fear that Tom would stop

loving her if she didn't have sex with him.

When she'd finished, Tom picked up her hand and kissed her fingertips. "I can't say I understand everything you've said, but I know I love you. I know that's not going to change."

Tracy felt tears of relief spring to her eyes. "You don't know how good it is to hear that," she said. "I've been so afraid."

Tom stroked her hand thoughtfully. "I don't know what else to say right now. I never thought about not having sex once we'd started. I guess I'd be willing to try. I need some time to think about it though. Can we talk more later?"

"Sure," said Tracy. "And I'm not suggesting this is for ever and ever. I just want to try it and see how it goes. I'd like to take the pressure off."

Later, as he drove to meet James, Tom was glad that Tracy hadn't come along. He needed to think. And to talk. He knew James and Serena had an agreement about not having sex. Maybe James would be a good person to talk to.

When Tom arrived at the basketball court,

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James was tossing the ball through the hoop one time after another. He'd been one of Rosemont's top players.

"Good to see you," he said. "This was getting boring."

"Do you miss playing on a team?" Tom asked.

"I do. Actually, State wanted me to play for them, but I just can't fit it in. Studying takes up most of my time. If I played I know my grades would go down. Plus I'd never get to see Serena. Things are tough enough as it is. Anyway, I'm on the team at my dorm and we have a lot of fun just messing around on the court."

Tom bounced the ball a few times and tried a shot. It rebounded off the backboard. The next shot made it through.

"So are you ready for a little one-on-one?" James asked. "I know this isn't exactly your sport...."

"Hey, I can toss a ball through a piece of wire." Tom pivoted suddenly and dribbled down the court. "Nothin' to it."

"I'm not responsible for what remains of you when I get done," James warned as he took off after him.

Half an hour later the perspiring, panting friends

took a break on the grass beyond the basketball court. "It feels good to move around," James said. "I spent all day yesterday in the library."

"How'd Serena feel about that? Didn't you come down here to see her?"

"She was at the library too," said James with a twinkle. "Anyway she teaches that gymnastics class on Saturday afternoons."

"Oh yeah," said Tom. "Tracy helped her out yesterday."

"Uh huh. That's what Serena said. I guess they had a long talk."

"They did?"

"You know how girls are. They talk about us all the time. And we never talk about them."

"Nope. Never.... So, uh...what do you think they talked about?"

"You sure you don't know?" James asked.

"Well, I do have an idea. Tracy came over this morning and she was real upset."

"Oh?"

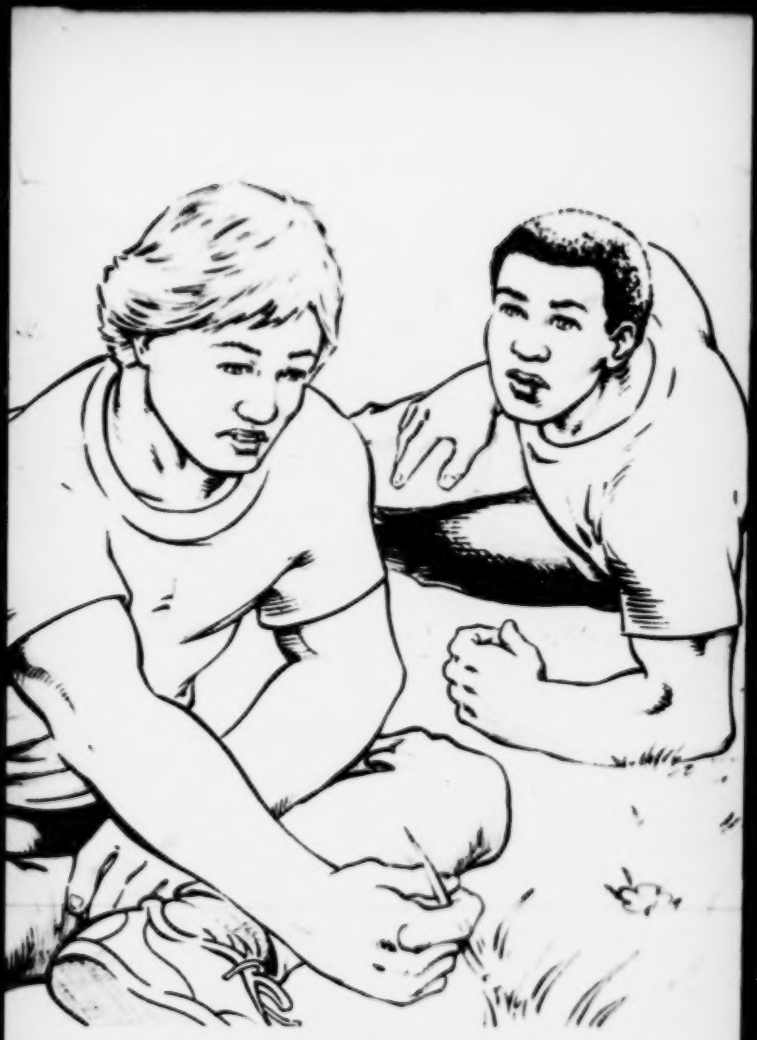
"Yeah. About sex. She doesn't think she can handle it right now."

"How do you feel?"

"Oh, I can handle it okay," Tom said.

James tried to keep a straight face. Then he gave up and laughed out loud. "I bet you can."

Tom laughed too. "Oh, I see. You meant how



"I don't understand why she changed her mind about sex."

do I feel about how Tracy feels? I don't know. To tell the truth, I don't understand why she changed her mind about sex. But I really love her. I guess taking a break would be okay...."

"But you wouldn't be happy about it."

Tom shook his head. "Not very. I don't see how you and Serena can do it."

"It's not easy sometimes," James said. "For either of us. But I guess that's part of growing up. Learning to do stuff you don't particularly like because in the end things will be a lot better. Serena and I have some serious goals. We have a lot to gain and a lot to risk. So we decided to wait until we get closer to the things we want." He smiled at Tom. "And we are getting closer."

"I never thought of it quite like that," said Tom. "I guess I feel like we'd be giving it up forever."

"Heck no, man," James said jabbing at his shoulder. "You've got your whole life ahead of you. Might as well do what you can now to guarantee yourself a long and happy one."

"This is heavy stuff," Tom said. "It's making my brain hurt. How about another game—*if* you think you're up to it?"

"It's your funeral, my friend."

They jumped up and headed back to the court.

Turn to page 67.

continued from p. 49

Although Tracy didn't say anything about how she was feeling, Tom knew something was wrong. She seemed distant when they were together. Sometimes she even seemed angry. Is it possible she likes someone else? he wondered. He didn't think so, but still he thought there must be something going on.

One day she didn't show up to meet him after school. When he got home, he headed for the phone to call her, but he stopped himself. I'll see if she calls, he thought.

She didn't. Neither did he. After school the next day he didn't wait for her. Now maybe she'll call, he thought. But she didn't.

She was polite enough to him in class, but she didn't ask any questions or offer any explanations. Neither did he.

This went on for three weeks.

On a Saturday night, for the fourth time, Tom walked to the telephone and stood staring at it. He picked up the receiver. Then he set it down again. Why be a fool? he asked himself. If she wants to talk to me she'll call. She's the one

who's been acting cold. The phone rang then and he nearly jumped out of his skin.

"Hello?"

"Hey, man. What're you doing at home?"

"Oh, hi, Zack."

"You're not going out with Tracy?"

"No. I guess not. She...uh...she's busy."

"So how about coming to Nicole's party with me?"

"Oh, I don't know...."

"Come on, man. You can't just sit around and feel sorry for yourself."

"I guess you're right. What time do you want to go?"

"I'll pick you up in half an hour, all right?"

"Okay. See you."

When Tom and Zack got to Nicole's house a little after 10:00, the party was in full swing. Music blared from the windows and doorway and people spilled out of the house and onto the porch.

"Just a quiet little get together, I guess," said Zack.

"Her mother must not be around," Tom noted.

They worked their way through the crowd at

the doorway and into the living room. People were crowded together on the sofa, in chairs and on the rug. In the dining area, the table had been pushed back to make room for dancing.

Tom peered through the semi-darkness looking for familiar faces. "Looks like there're a lot of people from other schools here," he noted.

"Let's find Nicole," suggested Zack, heading toward the kitchen.

Tom followed his friend. In the kitchen, several people were clustered around the stove, making popcorn.

"Zack!" Nicole detached herself from the group. "I'm so glad you finally got here," she exclaimed, flinging her arms around Zack's neck. "Oh, hi, Tom," she said, seeming to notice him for the first time. She looked around. "Is Tracy here?"

"Uh...no," Tom replied. "She was busy."

"Some party, huh?" Nicole said smiling.

"Where'd all these people come from anyway?" asked Zack.

"I don't know. I guess word just got around. I told my cousin who goes to King High—I guess there're a lot of kids from there."

"Hey, Nicole, where's the butter?" someone wanted to know.

"Just a sec," she said. "I'd better go check on

the popcorn. You guys want something to drink? There's some cokes and stuff in the fridge…and some people brought some beer."

Zack moved toward the refrigerator. "You want something, Tom?"

"No, thanks. I think I'll just look around a little."

Tom went back into the living room and leaned against the wall. He watched people talking, laughing and dancing. I'm glad somebody's having fun, he thought.

A soft voice caught his attention. "Tom? Is that you?"

Turning, he made out a pretty, familiar face in the dim light. "Cassie! What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I came with some friends from school." She nodded toward the dancers.

"So how are you? How do you like going to King?"

"It's okay, I guess. I have some good friends. Sometimes I miss Rosemont."

"You look real good," Tom said. "You look different though."

"I probably just look older. How long has it been? Two years or something?"

Tom nodded. "Almost two years."

"You look good too," she said. "How've you been?"

Someone turned up the music.

"Listen," suggested Tom, "Why don't we find a place where we can talk?

Cassie nodded. "There're some rooms down the hall. I guess it's okay to go back there. At least other people are."

As they made their way down the hall, Tom smiled, remembering. Cassie was the first girl he'd made love with. They'd been happy together, but when her family had moved out of town, they'd gradually stopped seeing each other.

The first door they tried was locked. The next door was open and the light was on. There were jackets piled on the bed and the floor. But at least there weren't any people.

"I guess this'll do," Tom said, pushing jackets out of the way and sitting on the bed.

Cassie sat down next to him. "This must be her brother's room," she said, looking at the football pennants and skateboard posters on the wall. She leaned back against the jackets with a sigh.

Now that they were in the light Tom could see more clearly how Cassie had changed. She'd lost weight and there was something different about her eyes.

"You're staring at me," she said. "What're you thinking?"

That's it, he thought. She has a different look

in her eyes—a guarded look, like she's protecting herself. "I was just looking at you," he said. "You've changed a little, but you're still beautiful."

To his surprise, Cassie's eyes filled with tears.

"Hey," he reached out to pat her arm. "What's this all about?"

"I'm sorry," she wiped her eyes with her sleeve and tried to smile. "I'm not in great shape tonight."

"Do you always cry when someone gives you a compliment?"

"It was just so sweet, Tom. It's been a while since a guy said anything like that to me."

"Well, I don't see why. Have you been hiding under a rock or something?"

"My boyfriend and I split up a few weeks ago. I guess I'm just having trouble adjusting. My friends brought me here to cheer me up, but it's not that easy."

"I know what you mean," Tom said. "It's sure not easy."

"What's happening with you?" Cassie wanted to know. "Are you having problems with your love life, too?"

Tom laughed shortly. "Yeah, you might say that. I've been going with this girl—Tracy—for almost a year now and things were going real

well until recently. Now I don't know what's wrong. It seemed like we were getting close. And then all of a sudden she starts pulling away from me. I just don't get it."

"Is there someone else she likes?"

"Someone else? No, no, it's not like that.... Is that what happened to you?"

Cassie nodded. "It wasn't anyone's fault really. He met another girl over summer vacation and I guess something just clicked between them. He didn't want to hurt me...at least, I think he didn't...but...." The tears were starting again. "But I loved him so much. I still do...and it really hurts." She was curled up next to him on the bed, clutching someone's denim jacket and sobbing.

"Hey, hey.... C'mon, Cass." Tom pried the jacket away from her and pulled her close. "It'll be okay." He patted her shoulder and rocked her gently.

She leaned against him and he could feel some of the tension begin to leave her body. He stroked her hair, remembering the tenderness they'd shared in the past. He pressed his cheek against the top of her head.

The door flew open then. "Hey, there you are. We thought you'd disappeared into thin air." Zack and Nicole swept into the room. "We were look-

ing for a quiet place around here but they all seem to be taken."

Tom and Cassie pulled away from each other.

"Oh, excuse us. Are we interrupting something?" Nicole asked.

"No, it's okay," said Cassie, getting up. "I'll be back in a minute."

Tom motioned to the rug. "So have a seat. Now that you're here."

Nicole flopped down and Zack sat next to her. He set three cans of beer in a plastic six-pack holder on the floor in front of them. "Want one?" he asked Tom, snapping off a can.

Tom hesitated.

"Come on. You look like you need to relax."

That's for sure, Tom thought. The evening's events and emotions had left him feeling uneasy and confused.

"Come on, Tom," Nicole urged, helping herself to one of the beers. "No one's going to tell the coach."

"It's not that," Tom said, thinking it really was partly that. He didn't like breaking training. He didn't want to feel that he was letting Coach Crowley down or that he was doing something unhealthy. Still, it was tempting. It would be good to just relax and go along with things.

"Suit yourself," said Zack, popping the top on

a beer and taking a swallow. "There's another one here if you want it."

What did Tom do?

Choice Point 6A
If you think Tom decided
not to drink a beer
turn to page 70.

Choice Point 6B
If you think Tom decided
to have a beer
turn to page 76.

continued from p. 57

When Tom told Tracy whatever she wanted was fine with him, she hugged him so hard he thought she'd cracked a rib. School activities were at a peak with both the football and cross-country seasons coming to a close and the holidays fast approaching. Tom was satisfied with the way he'd been playing ball. Rosemont had won most of their games and it looked like their chances of winning against King High were good.

The big game with King was just a week off when they held the awards banquet for the cross-country team. When Tracy went up to accept her trophy, Tom applauded and cheered louder than anyone in the room. I'm so lucky, he thought. I'm so glad she loves me.

After the dinner he rode back to Tracy's house with Tracy and her family. There was a strange car in the driveway. It was a ten year old baby-blue Volkswagen Rabbit, as bright and clean as if it had just come off the lot. "Somebody's at our house," Tracy said in a puzzled voice. "Whose car is that?"

"I don't know," said her dad, "but they're

blocking the garage."

"I don't see anyone around," said Mrs. Carter. She stopped the car at the curb and they all got out. Tom and Tracy went to check out the trespassing vehicle.

"There's something under the wiper," Tracy said. "What is it?"

Tom plucked the square of paper from the windshield. He took it under the streetlamp and looked at it briefly. He began to smile. "You'd better look at this," he said handing it to Tracy.

She squinted at the paper and mouthed the words as she read them. Her mouth dropped open. She looked at the car and then at her parents. "Mom...? Dad...? Is this real?"

She ran to the car and touched the hood, the windshield, the roof. Then she ran back to her parents. They held her as she hugged both of them together. "Oh, Mama.... Daddy...." She was starting to cry. "I don't believe it."

Her parents smiled at each other and at their daughter.

"It was supposed to be a Christmas present," Mrs. Carter explained, "but my friend wanted to sell it now, and...well, we just thought you really deserved something."

"You've been working so hard," added Mr. Carter.

"Tom, do you believe this?" Tracy said. She ran and hugged him. "Did you know about it?"

"I had no idea. I'm just as shocked as you are. In fact, I'm jealous. You got a car before I did."

"Oh, don't be jealous. I'll let you drive. Drive! Mom, Dad, where are the keys? Can I drive it?"

Mr. Carter dug in his pocket and held out a shiny key chain with the letters of Tracy's name spelled in brass. "Be our guest," he said.

"Come on, Tom," said Tracy. "Let's go."

They got into the car and she reached over to hug him. "I'm so happy," she said. "Thank you so much for being such a friend and always being here for me."

"You're welcome," said Tom. "It's easy 'cause I love you.... Now let's hit the road!"

THE END

continued from p. 66

"I'm gonna get a coke," Tom said. "Be right back."

When he returned, Cassie was back. She'd washed her face and fixed her hair. "I was just talking to Nicole and Zack," she said. "They remember me."

"Well, how could they possibly forget?" Tom asked. "I see why you two came in here," he said turning toward Zack and Nicole. "It's a zoo out there."

"I know," said Nicole mournfully. "I don't know what to do. Some of those people have had an awful lot to drink or smoke or something."

"How come you invited so many people?" Tom wanted to know.

"I didn't invite them all. I told my cousin at King to tell some of her friends. I guess she has a lot of friends."

There was a commotion outside the door and Nicole and Zack went out to investigate. Someone had vomited on the hall rug.

"I wish I'd never had this stupid party," Nicole moaned. "I wish they'd all go home. I tried to get some of the rowdiest ones to go and they just laughed at me."

"Tom and I could go have a little talk with

them," Zack suggested.

"That's exactly what I *don't* want. Then they'd get hostile."

"I have an idea," said Cassie. "I tried this once before and it worked. Do you have a small screwdriver?"

A half hour later the house was empty except for Nicole, her friends Melody and Kate, and Zack, Tom, and Cassie. The house was a disaster area, but at least the "guests" were gone.

Cassie and Tom sat on the sofa and looked around. "I hope Nicole gets out of this alive," Cassie said.

"Me too," said Tom. "But you were great. You really saved the day—or night, I guess."

They laughed as they recalled the confused looks on people's faces as they tried to figure out why the stereo had stopped working. It turned out that the plug had become detached from the electrical cord and mysteriously disappeared. Tom had turned on all the lights so they could search for the plug, but it was nowhere to be found. Eventually people lost interest and decided to find a better party somewhere else. Besides the refrigerator was just about empty.

Cassie reached into her skirt pocket. "I guess I'd better put this back on now," she said, holding up the missing plug.

"Can I help?" Tom offered, as she crawled behind the sofa to get the wire.

"Could you just move a little? You're blocking the light."

Tom went to look for Zack to see if he could help him straighten up. Together they scooped cans, bottles, crumpled bits of paper and pieces of food into a large trash bag. Zack offered Tom a beer.

"No thanks," he said. "Looks like I'm going to have to drive for you anyway."

"Drive where?" said Zack. "We're not leaving yet. At least I'm not."

"You're not?"

"No way. Nicole's mom's gone. Her friends are here but they're already asleep in her mom's room. Anyway, don't you want to stay and hang out with Cassie?"

"I...um...I don't know," said Tom. "I'll have to check with her." He went back into the living room. "Cassie?"

"Yes?" She was sitting on the sofa again. She looked relaxed and happy.

"Do you have a ride home? I thought you came with friends."

"I did. I told them it was okay to go on without me. I... I thought you could give me a ride."

"Well, I'd love to, but there's one problem."

"What's that?"

"I don't have a car. I came with Zack."

"Oh. Uh oh. I guess I should've checked with you first."

"I don't think Zack would mind taking you home, but the thing is...well, he's going to be here for a while."

"Oh. I see."

"So...maybe he'll let me borrow the car to take you. Or...I don't know... do you just want to hang out here for a while?" He sat down beside her.

She gave him a thoughtful look. "What do *you* want?" she said.

"What do I want?" he repeated slowly. "That's a good question. It's real good to see you, you know." He reached out and stroked her hair. "Kinda brings back old times."

She leaned her cheek against his hand and closed her eyes. When she opened them she looked at him questioningly. "So what do you want to do?"

He dropped his hand. "I don't know, Cass. I'm pretty confused these days."

"About your girlfriend you mean?" He nod-

ded. She sighed and sat up straighter. "Why don't you ask Zack if you can use his car? If it's okay, we can talk on the way to my house."

Cassie's home was in a neighboring town, about half an hour's drive away. On the way there and for quite a while after they'd pulled up in front of her apartment building, Tom and Cassie talked about their lives. Cassie poured out her pain and anger at having her boyfriend fall in love with someone else and Tom revealed his frustration and confusion over Tracy.

Finally Cassie yawned. "It's been so great talking with you," she said, "but it's super late and I can barely keep my eyes open."

"Now you've got me doing it," said Tom, laughing and yawning at the same time. "You're right, it's been great. I feel a lot better."

"And you'll do what I told you? You'll call Tracy?"

"I will. I promise."

"Because there's no sense in torturing yourself. You need to find out what's bothering her. Like I said, she could be miserable too, waiting for you to call. If there's anything that drives me crazy it's two people who love each other and

then act like they don't. You should realize how lucky you are."

"You remember what I said too," he reminded her. "You're gonna find someone a lot better than that turkey. You deserve the best and don't you forget it."

"Okay. If you say so." She started to open the door, then turned back to him. "I'm gonna go now. But there's just one more thing." She leaned close. "For old time's sake."

He bent and kissed her softly. "For old time's sake. Take care."

"You too." She let herself out of the car and walked briskly toward the building.

Turn to page 102.

continued from p. 66

Tom reached out and scooped the last can of beer from the floor. He popped the top off and took a long drink. It doesn't taste that great, he thought.

Cassie came back. She'd washed her face and fixed her hair. She smiled uncertainly.

"Hi, Zack," she said. "Remember me?"

"Sure," said Zack. "Nicole did you know Cassie when she was at Rosemont?"

"I think so," Nicole replied. She smiled at Cassie. "Hi."

"Hi," Cassie said, returning to sit next to Tom on the bed. "This is your house, isn't it?"

Nicole nodded. "At least it used to be. Before it was taken over by aliens from outer space."

"You did invite everybody and their cousin," Zack reminded her.

"Maybe I did. But I didn't think they'd all show up. And I didn't think they'd get so rowdy."

"Does your mom know about all this?" Tom asked.

Nicole shook her head. "She said I could have a couple of friends over. Anyway she won't be back until tomorrow afternoon. I guess we'll be able to get things cleaned up by then."

There was a commotion in the hallway. Zack

and Nicole jumped up and went to see what was happening. A minute later Nicole stuck her head in. "It's gross," she said. "Somebody got sick all over the hall rug. I wish I'd never had this stupid party. I wish they'd all go home."

"If you want people to leave," said Tom, "I've got an idea."

"What?"

"You could call the police and say you're a neighbor and have them come and break up the party."

Nicole thought for a moment. "But they might tell my mom."

"Your mom's probably going to find out anyway," Tom suggested.

"Oh, don't say that," she moaned.

"I've got an idea," said Cassie. "Do you have a small screwdriver?"

❁ ❁ ❁

A few minutes later, the blaring of the stereo was suddenly cut off, and the shouts and laughter of the crowd fell to a confused babble. Cassie emerged grinning from behind the sofa, where there was an electrical outlet.

"If you turn it off, they just turn it back on again. If you unplug it, they plug it back in. But

if you hide the plug they can't put it back on." She patted her pocket and winked.

A couple of people tried to get the stereo working again. "Hey, the plug's gone."

"What's going on?" someone demanded.

Tom turned the lights on and joined in the search for the missing plug. Soon, however, people lost interest and began to head for the door. With the music gone, the lights on, and the refrigerator just about empty, the party mood was broken.

Nicole and her girlfriends were in the hall trying to clean up the mess. Tom and Cassie sat back on the sofa and surveyed the scene. There were cups and cans and bottles everywhere, some of them tipped over and dripping onto the carpet. There were cigarette ashes on the upholstery and a spot that looked suspiciously like a burn on the arm of the sofa.

Cassie sighed, "I hope Nicole comes out of this alive."

"Me too," Tom agreed. "But you were great, Cass. You really saved the day—or night, I guess." He laughed and gave her a hug.

Leaning against him, Cassie laughed too. "Did you see the look on that one guy's face? He couldn't figure out how the plug could just disappear."

Zack came in. "Peace at last," he said, collapsing into a chair. "Here, let's celebrate." He tossed a can of beer to Tom. "I stashed these out back."

Tom opened the beer and offered some to Cassie. She took a small sip and handed it back.

Nicole came out then. "We had a great idea," she said. "We're going to call a carpet cleaning service in the morning."

"Good idea, babe," said Zack. "Why don't you just relax now?"

"In a minute. Will you help me get these bottles and cans cleaned up? Come on, I'll get a trash bag."

When they were alone again, Tom became acutely aware of Cassie's warm presence. It was comforting to have her there. Comforting and also—he had to admit—exciting. He drank some more beer.

"Tom?"

"Mmm?"

"Did you drive tonight?"

"Uh uh. I came with Zack." He looked at her. "Hey, that's right, you came with your friends. I guess they abandoned you, huh?"

"Not exactly, I told them it was okay. I thought I could get a ride with you. I guess I should've checked first."

"It's okay. I'm sure Zack won't mind taking

you." He finished the beer and set the can on the floor.

"Well, I don't want to impose. Besides, if he's been drinking, I don't...."

"Actually," said Tom, twirling a strand of Cassie's hair around his finger, "I think it's going to be a while before Zack is ready to leave. I think he and Nicole are going to have their own party...."

"Oh," she said, her face coloring. She giggled. "I don't know why I'm blushing. It's not like we're strangers or anything."

"No," said Tom. "It's not."

They looked at each other with a growing awareness in their eyes. Their faces were very close and they could feel each other's breath.

"Garbage delivery," Zack said cheerfully. "Anybody need any cigarette butts, sticky coke cans, broken beer bottles, used chewing gum?" He bustled around the room, scooping trash into a large plastic bag.

As he headed for the door, he paused, "Hey, Tom, you don't mind sticking around for a while, do you?"

"Uh, no. I guess it's okay." He looked at Cassie.

"I can stay," she said softly.

"Okay," said Zack. "Looks like Nicole's friends have flaked out already. They're sleeping

"It's not like we're strangers or anything."

in her mom's room. See you later." He flipped off the light.

Tom and Cassie sat still for a few moments in the darkness.

Tom turned toward Cassie. "Where were we?" he murmured.

Her lips touched his neck, "Here, I think," she said.

As they sank back on the sofa, Tom felt as though he was being pulled underwater. He tried to think clearly, but his body had its own ideas. He knew he still wanted to work things out with Tracy. He hoped Cassie understood that. But there wasn't time to explain. And it felt so good to be close to someone familiar, someone who cared. In the back of his mind a voice was saying "What about a condom?" But everything felt so good that he shut the voice out and gave up trying to think.

The following week was a hard one for Tom. He couldn't seem to concentrate on anything. When teachers called on him he would look at them blankly—"Oh sorry, could you repeat that?" And more than once the coach told him to wake up.

When he saw Tracy in class, she seemed to be staring at him with questioning eyes. He tried to act as he normally would around her but he couldn't remember what "normal" was anymore. He knew they had to talk, but he still hoped Tracy would make the first move.

He didn't know what he was going to do about Cassie. Making love with her had just made things more complicated, he thought. He liked her, but he didn't want to start going with her again. And he didn't know what she was thinking about him.

Every time the phone rang Tom jumped. He yelled at Boy and was sharp with his brother and sister.

"What on earth is wrong with you?" his mom demanded.

"Nothin'," he said. "Sorry."

Mrs. Johnson shook her head and muttered something about "moody teenagers."

Thursday night after dinner the telephone rang. Jennifer snatched it up before Tom could get there.

"It's a girl," she whispered loudly, handing him the receiver. "*Not* Tracy."

"Get out of here," he hissed. "Hello?"

"Hi, Tom. It's Cassie."

"Oh, hi. How are you? I was going to call."

"Were you? Listen, I've been thinking and I

decided it's important that we talk soon."

"Uh huh. That sounds good." That sounds terrible, he thought. How am I going to tell her I don't want to go with her?

"Do you think you could get out for a while tonight? I could meet you at that coffee shop over on Lakeview. You know, where we used to go sometimes."

"Oh.... Well, I guess. Sure." Might as well get it over with, he thought.

"Is eight o'clock all right? Or eight-thirty?"

"Eight's good. I'll see you there."

It began to rain as Tom drove across town, a steady, bone-chilling drizzle. Perfect weather, he thought. My mood exactly.

Sitting in the coffee shop booth, Cassie was all smiles and rosy cheeks. Seeing her made Tom feel better in spite of himself. He leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"You look great. How're you doing?"

"I'm doing fine. I feel so much better this week."

The waitress brought a pot of tea and a cup to the table. "Thanks," Cassie said. "Do you want some tea, Tom, or do you want something else?"

"Could I have a coke, please?" he asked.

"Certainly." The waitress smiled and bustled off.

"Are you feeling all right?" Cassie asked. "You look sort of pale."

"I dunno. I may be coming down with something. I feel sort of weird."

"Oh no. And you came out in this horrible weather."

"It's okay, really."

They looked at each other in silence. The waitress brought Tom's coke.

"So," Cassie said. "About Saturday night...."

"Yeah." Tom was fighting an urge to crawl under the table.

"It was nice," she went on.

He nodded. That part was true anyway.

"But I don't want you to get the wrong idea."

"Wrong idea?" His eyes widened.

"I...uh...well, I didn't want you to think that it meant more than it did.... I mean it meant something, but—" She looked at her tea cup and then back at him. "I'm sorry, I'm not saying this very well...."

"No, no. You're doing fine. Go on."

"Well, I was just about at my lowest point last weekend. And seeing you was—I don't know—it was just so nice to see you because we were

always such good friends. It felt so familiar and safe. And I guess I was feeling sorry for myself—like 'Nobody loves me.' You know what I mean?"

"I sure do."

"So anyway I guess I came on kind of strong...."

"You did? I thought I came on to you."

"Let's say it was mutual then," she suggested. She tried to hold back a smile but it escaped and she broke out laughing.

Tom laughed too, feeling the relief wash over him like a warm tide. "I've got a confession to make," he said.

"You do?"

He nodded. "I was dreading talking to you because I didn't know how I was going to tell you that we weren't going to be getting back together or anything."

"You thought I wanted to get back together?"

"Well, I...."

"You've got a big ego, don't you?" Her eyes were laughing at him.

"I guess." He smiled and reached across the table to squeeze her hand. "You're too much," he said.

She squeezed his hand back, then poured herself some more tea. "What about Tracy? Are

things going any better with her?"

Tom sighed. "Not really. Oh, I don't know. She acts friendly enough at school and all that. But she hasn't called. I don't know what she's thinking."

"Have you called her?"

"Nope."

Cassie shook her head. "I swear. Guys are impossible. Why don't you call her?"

"Why should I? She could just as well call me."

"You don't know what she's thinking, do you? You don't know why she's not calling?"

He shook his head.

"But you still care about her, right? You want to talk to her."

He nodded.

"Then why are you torturing yourself? Why not go home and call her right now?"

"This is ridiculous," Tom said. "I come here expecting to have to comfort you and give you some kind of pep talk. And instead you end up lecturing me on my love life."

"Well," said Cassie swallowing the last of her tea, "that's what friends are for."

They paid their bill and walked outside together. The rain had stopped, but the air seemed colder. "Brrr." Cassie shivered and fumbled in

her pocket for her car keys. "One more thing," she said. "You never asked, but I thought you might like to know...." She pulled out the keys. "I *am* on the pill."

Tom was startled. "Oh...uh...good. That's real good. I guess I wasn't thinking very clearly the other night."

She went on. "When my boyfriend and I split up, I didn't want to stop taking them. I guess I was hoping we'd get back together. Anyway, I'm glad I didn't stop."

"Yeah."

"But you didn't ask. I hope you're more careful with Tracy."

"Uh...well...we're usually pretty careful."

"Good. Well, let's not stand out here freezing to death." She gave his cheek a quick peck. "Call me and let me know how things are going."

"I will. For sure."

"Bye then."

"So long."

Tom headed for the phone as soon as he got in the door.

"Hi, hon," said his mom. "Tracy called."

"She did?"

Mrs. Johnson smiled at her son. "You're a popular guy."

"Right, Mom. I guess I'll use the kitchen phone."

"Hi," Tom said when Tracy answered. "It's me."

"Hi. I wasn't sure you'd call back."

"Of course I'd call back. In fact, I was going to call you."

"You were?"

"Uh huh."

"Why?" she demanded.

"Hey, you called me first. You tell *me* why."

Tracy giggled nervously. "Well, I wanted to know what's going on. I mean I know I've been sort of grouchy—"

"Yeah, sort of," Tom interrupted.

"But," she continued, "you've been real distant. It seems like we get close together and then pull apart. Anyway I think we should talk about it 'cause I feel rotten."

"That makes two of us," Tom said. "I guess I have been kind of distant. I thought you didn't want to be close."

"I do want to be close...only...well, let's get together and talk about it, okay? I want to be able to see your face."

"I want to see you, too. I've really been missing you. How about tomorrow afternoon?"

"Can't. I've got cross-country practice. How about afterwards? Oh wait...there's a game, huh?"

"Yeah, we're playing over at Hillcrest. We

have to be on the bus at six o'clock. Can you come to the game? We could go out after."

"I don't think so. We've got a meet Saturday morning so I have to get up super early." She sighed. "Maybe we're doomed."

"How about Saturday afternoon? Let's take the dogs out or something."

"Okay.... Whew! I'm glad we figured that out."

"Yeah. I feel a lot better knowing we're going to talk."

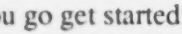
"Me too. At least I can get a good night's sleep."

"Well, I'll let you go get started then."

"Okay, G'night."

"Good night. Sweet dreams, Trace."

Tom whistled softly to himself as he got ready to take a shower. When he took off his underwear he noticed a stain. That's weird, he thought. He flicked them into the laundry without another thought.



The weekend passed quickly for Tom. The

game with Hillcrest had been a joke. Rosemont won 30-6. Still, it was good practice, Tom thought. On Saturday he picked up Tracy after the cross-country meet. They'd planned to take their dogs out for a run, but it started to rain so they ended up back at her house in front of a cozy fire. Tracy's parents were shopping most of the afternoon and her sister was at a friend's, so they were able to talk. Tracy explained that she'd been feeling overwhelmed by the sexual part of their relationship.

"It's not that I don't want to be close to you," she said. "I do. But there's so much going on with school and with track for me and football for you. Then I'm trying to plan for college.... Plus I can't help worrying. What if we got caught, or pregnant, or got some disease.... I just want things to slow down.

Even though he didn't feel as much stress as she did, Tom understood Tracy's feelings. He agreed to take things more slowly. Besides it wasn't as if she wanted to give up sex entirely. She wanted to feel that she had a choice about it and that it wasn't expected every time they were alone together.

"Sometimes it's good just to talk and hug," she said. He hugged her in agreement.

There was just one problem. At first Tom didn't

even want to think of it as a problem, hoping if he ignored it, it would go away. He'd discovered the stains on his underwear were due to a watery fluid that was leaking from his penis. Not only that, but every time he went to the bathroom, he felt an itching, burning sensation. Tom was at a loss for what to do. It's too embarrassing to talk to my friends about, he thought. And it would be really hard to face Mom and Dad with it. Could I have an STD? he asked himself. I've only had sex once in over a month, and that was with Cassie. Wouldn't she have told him if she had something?

He tried to remember what he'd learned about STDs in health class. Something about some people not having symptoms. Plus they did say use a condom *every* time. Tom groaned. What a jerk I've been. What am I going to do?

Maybe I should call Cassie, he thought. I should see how she's feeling. Maybe she'll know what to do.

But how can I do that? You can't just call someone up and say, "Hi, I think I got an STD from you."

Tom felt ready to cry from the pain and worry and fear. He knew he had to act soon.

What did Tom do?

Choice Point 7A

If you think Tom **called Cassie** to tell her about his suspected STD

turn to page 106.

Choice Point 7B

If you think Tom decided **not to call Cassie**

turn to page 116.

continued from p. 51

Tracy peeked through the doorway into the classroom. The students had all left for the day, but Mrs. Diaz was at her desk grading a stack of papers.

She looked up. "Hi, Tracy. Are you looking for someone?"

"Oh...uh...no."

"Can I help you with something? Why don't you come on in?"

Tracy laughed nervously as she approached the teacher's desk. "I was wondering if I could talk to you."

"Of course. Sit down." Mrs. Diaz got up and pulled a desk over next to Tracy. She sat down and smiled, waiting.

"Well," Tracy began, "I need some advice, I guess. I was hoping you could help me...."

"I'll sure try."

"It's about Tom and me. Umm...I'm kind of worried that we might be taking chances, you know...with sex. But I can't seem to talk to him about it. I don't know why—but I just sort of freeze up."

Mrs. Diaz nodded. "Tell me a little bit more about you and Tom. You've been going together for some time, haven't you?"

"I was wondering if I could talk to you."

"Yes, but, well, we didn't start...um...having sex until a couple of months ago. I...uh...well, neither one of us was a virgin. But I wanted to wait 'cause I was afraid of getting too involved and then getting hurt." She felt herself beginning to choke up. "And it's not like I think Tom doesn't love me or anything—but things aren't the same anymore. It seems like we're getting further apart instead of closer together."

Mrs. Diaz handed Tracy a kleenex. "You say you're worried about taking chances. Are you taking any precautions at all?" her teacher asked.

Tracy shook her head. "I know it's stupid. I've always told my friends to be careful. But when it comes down to it...I guess I just don't know how to bring up the subject. I mean, I keep thinking if he wanted to use something, he'd be using it."

"Do you think it's possible that he feels the same way? Maybe he's concerned too and doesn't know how talk about it."

"Do you think so?" asked Tracy. "I never thought about it that way."

"Of course I don't know," said Mrs. Diaz. "But I'd say it's entirely possible." She paused and thought for a moment. "How would you say your communication with Tom is overall?"

Tracy smiled for the first time. "Oh, it's really good. We can talk about a lot of things. We have

a lot in common and Tom's really understanding. In most ways it's much better than I ever thought it could be."

"You didn't expect the relationship to be good?"

"Well, I guess not. Before Tom I didn't have very good luck with relationships. With one relationship, really. After that, I swore I wouldn't get involved again 'cause it was just too painful."

"So this other fellow let you down in some way?"

Tracy felt her eyes mist over again. "It's so weird. Even now I get upset thinking about it. He didn't feel the same way about me as I did about him, but it seemed like I was the only one who didn't know that."

"If you don't mind my asking, Tracy," said Mrs. Diaz gently, "did you use any kind of protection in that relationship?"

Tracy shook her head. "I can't believe how dumb I was. He said using a condom was too much of a hassle and I was afraid to push the issue 'cause I didn't want him to leave me...."

"Do you think Tom will leave you if you insist on using protection?"

Tracy stared at her. "No, I guess I don't really think that. But maybe that's one reason it's hard to talk with him about it. Maybe deep down I'm

scared he'll be like Vince. Even though I know he's not."

"That's possible. So tell me, what do you want to do about all this?"

"I guess I've got to do something, huh?" She thought for a moment. "I know I need to talk to Tom."

"It sounds like you're feeling a lot of pressure right now," Mrs. Diaz said. "Have you thought about taking a break from sex and giving yourselves a chance to think and talk about what you really want?"

Tracy thought for a moment. "I think that for now we're probably going to keep having sex. So I'd like to be prepared."

"Have you thought about the method or methods you'd like to use? You know you'll need protection from both pregnancy and STDs."

"I know. I figured we'd probably use condoms—for STD protection anyway. Then I could also go to the family planning clinic and see about getting on the pill."

"I think that would be an excellent idea. And condoms—with spermicide—are a good choice. Because even if you start taking birth control pills you'll want to be protected from disease. You might even consider buying the condoms yourself."

Tracy looked alarmed. "Me?"

Mrs. Diaz leaned forward. "Tracy, this is a serious issue and I can't stress strongly enough how important it is to take it seriously. You're a special person, Tracy. You're a lovely young woman with many talents and so much potential—and you're the only one who can truly take responsibility for giving yourself the chance to become everything you can be. Tom's a fine person. And he needs to take responsibility for his health and his future, too. But you're the one who has to look out for Tracy." She smiled gently. "I know it sounds like I'm preaching at you. It's just that I care a lot about my students and hate to see them take needless risks when there's so much at stake."

"Thanks, Mrs. Diaz. It feels good to know someone cares about this."

"Speaking of people who care, what about your parents? Have you talked to them about any of this?"

"Not much really. Well, you see my dad's great but he's pretty old-fashioned—he gets embarrassed easily and then he just gets mad. And my mom, well, I know I should probably talk to her, but she's kind of busy and stressed out these days. I don't want to add to her problems."

"Are you worried about her reaction?"

"Yeah, I guess I am. She's usually pretty understanding, but we haven't talked much about sex. Especially since I've been...you know . . . ."

"Well," said Mrs. Diaz thoughtfully, "I don't know your mother, but speaking as a mom myself, I'll bet she'd really appreciate your sharing this part of your life with her. Even though it's painful sometimes, parents generally appreciate it when their kids confide in them. We like to feel that you trust us."

"Oh, I do trust my folks. I'm just not sure how my mom would react."

Mrs. Diaz smiled. "It would be nice if we could always predict people's reactions in advance, wouldn't it? But maybe it wouldn't be as interesting that way. Anyway, why don't you just think about it?"

"I will."

The teacher patted Tracy's hand. "Feel free to come talk to me anytime."

"Thanks a lot," Tracy said, getting up from the desk. "You've been a big help."

As she rode the bus home, Tracy thought more about her talk with Mrs. Diaz. She still didn't know if she'd be able to talk to Tom. But she knew she had to do something. I wonder if I'd actually have the nerve to buy condoms, she thought. As the bus went through the downtown

area, it passed a drug store. I could get off right now, she thought. I could go back there and buy some condoms before I lose my nerve. She stood up to pull the cord to signal the bus to stop. But as she reached for it, she hesitated....

What did Tracy do?

Choice Point 8A

If you think Tracy decided **to buy condoms**

turn to page 118.

Choice Point 8B

If you think Tracy decided **not to buy condoms**

turn to page 124.

continued from p. 75

The next day Tom bicycled over to Tracy's house. As he was taking his bike out of the garage, Boy eyed him intently.

"Okay, okay, you can come," Tom said. "Where's your leash?"

Holding the leash in one hand, Tom pedaled at a moderate speed so the dog could keep up. Boy trotted along happily, smiling his goofy dog-smile, his tail in the air.

She'd better be home, Tom thought as he rang the doorbell. I don't want to have to work up my nerve all over again.

Tracy opened the door and stared at him.

"I figured if I came over you couldn't hang up on me," he said.

"Why would I hang up on you?" She still looked stunned.

"Can I come in? Can we talk?"

"Of course, sure. Oh wait, let's put Boy in the back yard." She came out, closing the door behind her.

Tom followed her around to the side of the house.

"Muffin," Tracy called, "you've got company." She opened the gate and Boy scooted through, wiggling with delight at the sight of his best four-

footed friend.

Tracy closed the gate and leaned back against it. She smiled shakily. "What a surprise."

"What gives anyway, Trace?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've been acting real strange. Have we broken up, or what?"

"I don't know. You haven't called or come over. And at school you just sort of ignore me."

"Well, you haven't called either. I just can't take much more of this kind of thing."

"That makes two of us," she said. She walked back to the front porch and sat down on the steps.

Tom sat beside her. "What do you want to do?"

"Well," she said, "it depends on you." She searched his face. "I'm glad you came over."

He was encouraged by her words and reached for her hand.

"I guess I have been sort of avoiding you," she said.

"That's putting it mildly."

"Well, it's like I told you before. I care about you so much, but sometimes things just seem to be going so fast. There's so much other stuff going on in my life right now that it's kind of overwhelming to always have to worry about if we're going to make love and if we're going to

get caught and if we're really safe from getting pregnant or catching a disease.... Sometimes it's just too much!"

He brushed her hair back from her face and traced his finger down her jaw. "You sure do worry a lot," he said smiling. His look turned serious and he added, "But I am trying to understand."

"It's been awful without you the last few weeks," she went on. "I don't know, maybe what I want is impossible."

"Well, what is it exactly?"

"That's been the problem. I guess I don't really know what I want. But I think I'd like for us to go slower. So I don't have to feel like we're going to have sex every time we're alone. It's not that I want to give up sex entirely. I just want to have some say in it."

"But you could have said no any time. I never forced you into anything, did I?"

"No, you didn't. But sometimes I went along with it because I didn't want to hurt your feelings or make you mad."

"You mean you didn't like it?"

"I'm not saying that." She swatted at him playfully. "It is possible to like something on the one hand and still not feel right about it on the other, you know."

"Yeah, I guess that's true," he sighed heavily. "Life isn't as simple as I used to think."

Tracy reached for Tom's hand, "I'm sorry that I couldn't explain it better before. I...I do love you, even though it may be hard to believe."

"I believe it if you say it." He brought her hand to his lips. "What hurts is that you had sex with me when you didn't want to. And that you didn't trust me enough to say so."

"It's not your fault, Tom. How could I expect you to read my mind? I think both of us could have been more open and less stubborn."

He nodded. He looked out across the yard, over the roof tops, and beyond the trees to the brilliant blue sky. It seemed that the sun was shining for the first time in weeks.

"It's a great day," he said. "Let's take those mangy mutts for a run in the park."

"I'll get Muffin's leash," she said. "In a minute." Then her arms were around his neck and she was kissing him. He returned the kiss with equal enthusiasm.

THE END

continued from p. 93

"Hi, Cass? It's me, Tom."

"Hi. How's it going? I've been thinking about you."

"Well, Tracy and I had a long talk and worked some things out...."

"Great."

"So how are you?"

"I'm fine. Still kind of up and down. But things are going well at school and I've started playing the piano and writing some songs again."

"That's good.... So...uh, you're feeling okay? Physically, I mean?"

"Yeah, I am. Why? What's wrong? Your voice sounds funny."

"This is really embarrassing...

"Well, I've been getting these...uh, symptoms. And I thought maybe you might... well—"

"What kind of symptoms?"

"Oh, Cassie, this is really embarrassing, but I think I have an STD."

There was silence on the other end of the line.

"Cassie? Are you there?"

"I'm here. You think I gave it to you?"

"I don't know what to think. I haven't been with anyone else for over a month."

More silence. "I don't see how I could have anything, Tom. I feel fine. Maybe it's not an STD. Have you been to a doctor?"

...but I think I have an STD."

"No. I...I don't know where to go. I don't know how much it will cost or anything. Plus what if my folks found out?"

"Now listen, Tom. If you have symptoms, you'd better get checked right away. It could be serious. Besides, I'd like to know what's going on. I mean, what if this is something you've had for a while and you gave it to me only I just haven't felt it yet?"

"I never thought of that. Do you have any idea where I should go?"

"There's a clinic right downtown. Why don't you call them—the number's in the phone book—and make an appointment. Then you can ask how much it'll cost and whatever else you're worried about."

"Yeah, I guess I'd better do that."

"Okay. Call me as soon as you know something."

"I will."

As soon as he hung up, Tom picked up the telephone directory and found that the clinic's number was in the Yellow Pages under both "Clinics" and "Family Planning." He made an appointment for the following afternoon and was

told by the woman on the phone that he wouldn't have to pay if he couldn't afford it and that his parents wouldn't be contacted.

The actual visit to the clinic wasn't as bad as he'd imagined. He filled out several forms and answered a lot of questions about his sex life, but the people were friendly and easy to talk to. They took samples of his urine and the discharge from his penis. It was embarrassing, but at that point Tom was ready to do anything to stop the itching and burning.

"The results of your test will take about three days," Ms. Nomura, the clinic worker, told him. "We know you have an infection of the urethra. It could be caused by several different organisms. The laboratory tests on the samples we've taken will tell us if you have gonorrhea, chlamydia, or some other STD. In the meantime, we'll get you started on a medication that clears up all of the most common sexually transmitted infections. Can we call you at home when we get your test results?"

"Would it be all right if I called you instead?"

"Of course. Or you can stop by in the afternoon."

Tom got up to leave.

"There are a couple of other things." Ms. Nomura said. "I'm sure I don't have to tell you

that you need to refrain from sexual relations until you're cured."

He sat down again with a sigh. "Actually, it's the farthest thing from my mind right now."

She smiled. "I'm sure it is. But when you start to feel better, you just might change your mind. It's essential that you get checked to make sure you have a clean bill of health. And then, when you do resume sexual activity, I hope you'll use condoms—every time, without fail."

"I will. I don't want to go through this again. For anything."

"And I'm sure you don't want your partner to go through it either. These types of diseases may not be as painful for a woman to have—especially at first—but they can cause serious damage to her reproductive organs. They can make it very difficult or impossible for her to ever get pregnant, and a man who doesn't get treated and cured may not be able to father children."

"So it's possible for a girl to have this and not even know it?"

"Both men and women can have an STD without any symptoms. That's why you must tell any sexual partner—or partners—you've been with recently. Someone passed this disease to you, Tom, and if she doesn't know she has it, it could cause serious damage. And she could pass it along

again without knowing it."

"This may seem like a dumb question...," Tom began.

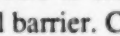
"There are no dumb questions, I assure you."

"Well, what I was wondering is . . . if a girl is on birth control pills, doesn't that help protect her from this kind of thing?"

"Not a bit. The only birth control method that helps prevent STDs is the condom, because it forms a physical barrier. Condoms with spermicide provide the most complete protection and they're easy to get, to carry around, and to use." She gave him a look of motherly concern. "Of course, you do have to *use* them in order for them to work."

"Yeah." He smiled sheepishly. "Well, thanks."

"You're welcome. We'll see you soon."



As soon as he got home, Tom called Cassie.

"You'd better get checked," he said. "They said you could have something and not even know it."

"I already made an appointment for tomorrow. At first, when you called, I was just shocked. I couldn't believe I could have anything. Then I started thinking about it more and getting wor-

ried.... Oh Tom, if I gave you something, I'll feel horrible."

"Hey, don't worry about it. We both could have been more careful."

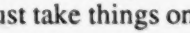
"I just never really worried about diseases that much. I mean I was on the pill so I guess I felt protected. I know it was stupid of me...."

"Hey, cut it out. In the first place you don't even know if you have something, and even if you do it's not a hundred percent your fault. It takes two, you know."

"I know. That's another thing. It would mean I'd have to talk to my ex again."

"Well, let's just take things one step at a time, okay? I'll call you when I get my results."

"Okay."



As soon as he hung up, the phone rang.

"Boy, are you hard to get ahold of," Tracy said. "First I waited for you after practice, but Zack said you didn't show up. Then I called your house and nobody knew where you were. Then your line's been busy for ages."

"Hi, babe," Tom said, trying to sound casual. His mind raced ahead, searching for reasonable explanations. "I...uh...I had to go downtown to

the library to get some information. I've got a paper due in English Lit that I'd forgotten all about."

"Was that you on the phone?"

"You sure want to know a lot."

"Well, excuse me. I was just asking. You don't have to make a big deal of it."

"It's not a big deal. I had to check on the assignment with someone from my English class."

"When's the paper due?"

"Uh, Monday. Looks like I'm going to be busy with it all weekend."

"Is there anything I can do to help? I had English Lit last semester. I might have some material that would help. What's the topic?"

"Oh...it's...." Tom was kicking himself for getting into such a complicated lie. Now he had to come up with a subject for a paper that didn't even exist. "Well, to tell you the truth, I haven't decided yet. Probably something about...uh... symbolism, you know, like the whale in *Moby Dick*."

"It's due Monday and you're still not sure what it's on? How come you let it go so long?"

"Well, I've been stressed out. The last few weeks have been kind of hard, or didn't you notice?"

"Hey, you don't have to get sarcastic. I'm just

trying to help."

"I'm sorry, Trace. I guess I'm mad at myself for forgetting about the paper. Anyway, thanks for offering but I guess I'd better do it myself. I'm sorry you waited around for me."

"It's okay. It wasn't long. Anyway, I called to see if we could get together and study or something over the weekend."

"Let's see how it goes, all right? I mean, I do want to see you, but it might be better if I work on the paper without any distractions."

"I wouldn't distract you if you didn't want me to."

He could tell Tracy's feelings were hurt. But he wanted to avoid close situations with her for a while. "I know you wouldn't do it on purpose, but let's just wait and see. I'll call you Saturday, I promise."

"Well...all right."

"Hey, Trace. I love you, you know."

"You're sure?" He couldn't tell if she was teasing or serious.

"Of course I'm sure. I'll see you at school tomorrow."

As he suspected, Tom did have an STD and so

did Cassie. It was chlamydia, a common infection. They both started taking pills to cure it. Tom had to take pills for one week and then go back to the clinic to be checked.

"How are you feeling?" Cassie asked Tom when she called him Saturday afternoon.

"A lot better. It's such a relief."

"Are you going to tell Tracy?"

"I'd rather not. She doesn't know about you and me—I mean about our night together—and I don't think she'd be very happy about it."

"I know I wouldn't be if I were in her place."

"I hope you don't have any serious problems from this, Cass. They said it could be dangerous if it's not treated."

"Thanks. I hope so too. At least I found out about it early."

"I'll call you next week, okay?"

"Okay. Bye, Tom."

"Bye."

Turn to page 145.

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continued from p. 93

Maybe it's just a temporary condition, Tom thought. Maybe it'll go away. Instead, the symptoms got worse. The discharge from his penis had started to thicken and turn white, and the burning when he urinated was unbearable. Keeping his mind on schoolwork or his football game was becoming impossible.

Who can I talk to? Tom wondered. Zack? He probably doesn't know any more than I do. Coach Crowley? He'd know what to do, but I don't think I could face him. Mom and Dad? Mom would help of course, but it would be embarrassing to talk to her. And she'd get on my case for not being careful. Dad? Well...he might get mad...but on the other hand, he might know what to do. I don't know though. It's been a long time since we talked about anything personal....

What did Tom do?

Choice Point 9A

If you think Tom decided **not to talk** to his dad

turn to page 133.

Choice Point 9B

If you think Tom decided **to talk** to his dad

turn to page 138.

continued from p. 101

By the time Tracy pulled the signal cord and the bus stopped, they were three blocks past the drugstore. She walked determinedly back toward the store, trying not to think about what she was going to do. Was it her imagination or were people staring at her?

Once inside the store she hesitated. She knew there was a large selection of condoms back near the pharmacy section. But there were also some right next to the check-out stand. She stopped at the jewelry counter and fiddled with a pair of earrings. I guess I'll go back to the main section, she thought. Maybe there won't be so many people around.

To Tracy's dismay, there were many different kinds of condoms to chose from. Dozens of brightly colored boxes and packets offered a variety of options: ribbed, lubricated, reservoir tipped.... Don't they just have some kind of "starter" package for beginners? Tracy mused. A middle-aged woman came down the aisle and paused near her. The woman selected a box labeled "contraceptive gel" and continued on her way. She smiled at Tracy as she passed. Tracy felt hot and hoped she wasn't blushing. Just grab something and get out of here, she told herself,

To Tracy's dismay, there were many different kinds of condoms to choose from.

reaching toward the shelf. Just make sure they contain spermicide. She snatched up a package and hurried to the cash register with it held tightly against her jacket. She tried not to fidget as she waited in line. Maybe I should get something else, she thought. So this doesn't look so... obvious. She took some gum from the rack next to the check-out line.

When her turn came to pay she nodded casually at the cashier and watched his face for signs of disapproval or amusement. There didn't seem to be any. "Have a nice day," he said, dropping her purchases into a small white paper bag.

It wasn't nearly as bad as I thought, she told herself as she headed toward the bus stop. She felt like skipping. She couldn't wait to call Christy and tell her about it. She was less sure, however, about how to tell Tom.

Tracy stood on the sidelines and watched Rosemont's football team practice. The big game with King High was just three days away and the team was preparing for it emotionally as well as physically. When the coach called it quits, Tom took off his helmet, wiped his face on his sleeve and jogged over to greet her.

"Hi," he gasped. His chest was still heaving from the workout.

"Hi. You guys were really into it out there."

"Yeah." He grinned.

Tracy thought he'd never looked better. "Can I walk you home?" she asked.

"Sure, that'd be great. Just let me get changed." He followed the rest of the team into the gym.

Tracy had decided to tell Tom about the condoms before they got in a situation where they would need them. She was afraid she would lose her nerve if she waited until the last minute. As they walked the six blocks to Tom's house, she tried to think of how to introduce the subject. When the house came into view and she still hadn't thought of anything, she stopped.

"What's the matter?"

"Umm...well...." She fought back a nervous giggle. "I've got something to show you."

"Can't it wait till we get to the house?"

"Well, it's private. I don't want anyone in your family to see."

He looked at her curiously. "What's the big mystery anyway?"

"I got something for you...for us." She pulled

the box from her jacket pocket. It was still tightly wrapped in the paper bag. "Here, look inside."

She watched his face as he opened the bag and peered in. Please don't be mad, she thought. I did it for *us*.

She saw him look more closely, his brows knit in perplexity. Then his cheeks turned pink. He blushed from his collar to his hair. He glanced at her, then back at the package. "What a surprise," he said finally.

"You're not mad, are you?"

"No, I'm not mad. Did you buy these?"

"You think I stole them or something? Yes, I bought them."

"Wow." He put the package in his own pocket and took her by the arm. "Let's go in—it's freezing out here."

Travis and Jennifer were at the dining table doing their homework when Tom and Tracy came in.

Mrs. Johnson was in the kitchen. "You two want some hot chocolate?" she asked. She slipped a pan of meatloaf into the oven and closed the door.

"That'd be great, Mom," said Tom.

"Here's the chocolate mix," she said. "The milk's on the counter. I have to make some phone calls." She patted his shoulder on the way out.

Tracy laughed. "Get the cups, okay, Tom? I'll heat the milk."

They sat close together on the sofa as they sipped their drinks. "I've got to hand it to you, Trace," Tom said. "You've got more nerve than I do."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I've been thinking we should be using protection. But I was too embarrassed to do anything about it."

"You were? So how do you feel now?"

"Now I can't wait for the chance to try them out." He nuzzled her ear.

"Hey, watch out," she said. "You're spilling my hot chocolate." But she was laughing.

Turn to page 162.

continued from p. 51 or 101

"I'm worried about Tracy," said Serena as she carefully steered through the rush-hour traffic. She and Christy had been out delivering boxes of clothes that Serena's mother had collected for homeless families.

"I know," replied Christy. "There's something going on between her and Tom, but she won't tell me what it is."

"Whatever it is, it's really tearing her up. Last Saturday she came to help me out at the gymnastics class, and she got real upset. First she yelled at the kids, then she ran out crying. That's not like her."

"Maybe we should talk to her," Christy said.

"I tried, but she said she just has to think about some things."

"Well, maybe we could persuade her to talk if we both went to see her."

"Either she'll talk or she'll end up hating us both."

"Sweet, lovable old us?" Christy asked. "No way."

Serena turned the car around at the next intersection.

⚄ ⚄ ⚄

Tracy opened the door for Serena and Christy.

"Hi," she said. "Why are you here? Did I forget about something?"

"Relax," said Christy. "We just wanted to see you."

"Can we come in?" Serena asked. "It's cold out here."

"Oh sure. Come in. You want something to drink—a diet soda or something?"

"No, that's okay," said Christy. "We have to get back for dinner pretty soon anyway. We were in the neighborhood and thought we'd stop by."

"What are you doing around here?"

"Oh, we had to deliver some boxes of clothes for one of Serena's mom's projects. We dropped them off over there someplace." She waved her hand vaguely.

"Want to come to my room?" Tracy offered.

"We thought you'd never ask," said Serena.

"So how's everything?" Tracy asked when they were settled in her room. She and Christy were sprawled on the bed while Serena had the desk chair. "Did you talk to James?"

Serena smiled and nodded. "He's pretty sure he can be here for the big game. I'm keeping my fingers crossed."

"I don't want to hear about it," Christy moaned. "I don't know if David's even going to make it back for Christmas. You two don't know how

lucky you are having boyfriends you can actually get your hands on."

"Poor Chris," said Serena. "I know it's hard having David so far away. And I do know how lucky I am, believe me."

At least, thought Tracy, if your boyfriend's away at college you don't have to worry about getting pregnant or catching diseases.

"So how are you, Trace?" Serena asked, "We haven't talked much lately."

"If you're talking about last Saturday," Tracy said rather stiffly, "I'm sorry about how I acted. I don't know what happened."

"Forget it. It's not important. I hope things are going better for you now."

Tracy lowered her head and didn't reply. Christy leaned over and put her hand on her friend's knee. "Is there anything we can do?" she asked gently. "Can you talk about it?"

A tear trickled from Tracy's eye and dropped off the end of her nose. "I don't know. Maybe. I don't know what good it'll do though."

"It *always* helps to talk." Christy said. "So what's the problem?"

"The problem is I just don't understand guys. Things always get so messed up."

"I know you got burned with Vince," Serena said. "But haven't you and Tom been happy?

You've been together almost a year now."

"I don't know. I thought we were happy. But then.... I think it started to fall apart when we started having sex."

"Why? What happened?" asked Christy.

"Nothing happened exactly. But everything seemed to change somehow. We always seem to be looking for the chance to be alone...and we have to worry about getting caught. Plus Tom doesn't use any kind of protection—just like Vince—so I'm getting really nervous about that."

Serena and Christy stared at their friend.

"Are you totally insane?" Christy finally asked.

Tracy gave a nervous half-smile.

"Why doesn't he use anything?" Christy demanded. "He's in our health class. He knows what the facts are."

"I don't know why. I...we haven't talked about it."

"Haven't talked about it?" Christy flung herself backward on the bed and covered her eyes with her forearm. "That does it. I give up."

"Come on, Chris," Serena said. "Don't be so dramatic." She turned to Tracy. "I know it's hard to talk about these things. But I think you're making a mistake to think Tom's gonna react like Vince. He's probably embarrassed too."

Christy sat up. "I'm sorry if I overreacted,"

she said. "I can't believe you haven't even talked about this stuff. Remember last year? When David and I started going together? You were always saying 'Talk it over. Tell him what you're feeling.'"

Tracy sniffed and reached for a kleenex. "I know I should practice what I preach. But I don't know.... I just think if a guy really cares, he'll use something without you having to make a point of it. It doesn't seem like asking too much."

"I don't know, Trace," said Serena. "I don't think it's any easier for them than it is for us."

"You want me to talk to him?" offered Christy.

"Don't you dare," Tracy snapped. "I mean it, Chris. I'm gonna handle this my own way."

"Okay, okay. Don't have a cow."

The door popped open then and Tanya stuck her head in. "Dad says to tell you dinner's ready."

"Uh oh," Christy said. "I guess we'd better get out of here." She looked thoughtfully at Tracy. "Are you going to be all right?"

Tracy nodded. "Yeah. I just have to think about this. Thanks for stopping by." She stood up.

Christy stood too and hugged Tracy. "Good luck," she said. "I hope you're not mad at me."

Tracy managed a smile. "Course I'm not mad. See you tomorrow."

Serena hugged her too. "Think about what I

said, Tracy, okay?"

"Okay. Bye. Thanks."

The night before the big game Tracy and Tom went to the gym to help decorate for the dance that would follow. Several other guys from the football team were there to help, but it seemed to Tracy they were mostly horsing around. Watching them, she felt a surge of anger. They're so immature, she thought. She closed her eyes.

"Is something wrong?" Nicole asked.

"I guess I do have a little headache."

"Want me to find you some aspirin?"

"Uh...well, okay. Thanks." She smiled wanly.

"Hey, anyone got some aspirin?" Nicole yelled.

One of the girls rummaged in her backpack and found a bottle.

"Thanks," said Tracy. She accepted two of the pills and headed for the drinking fountain.

When she returned a concerned-looking Tom came over to her. "Are you okay?"

"I guess so."

"I'll take you home if you want."

They drove in silence until they neared Tracy's house. As they approached their usual parking spot, Tom asked, "Do you want to stop?"

Tracy glared at him. "No, I don't want to stop."

"Geez, I'm sorry I asked. I thought maybe your headache was better since you took the aspirin."

"Well, it's not."

He stopped in front of her house and shut off the engine. Tracy sat staring stonily ahead.

"Trace?" Tom reached to pull her closer to him. "Is something bothering you?"

"Yes, you could say that." She shook off his hand.

"Well, what is it?"

"It's the same thing that's been bothering me for a long time."

"Well, *what?*" he practically yelled.

"I just wish you'd think of *me* once in a while."

He stared. "I think of you all the time."

"You think about sex. And football. Sex and football. That's your whole life."

"Tracy, what're you talking about? This is the night before the big game. I don't need this kind of thing right now."

"*You* don't need this kind of thing? What about me? What about what I need? Did you ever think about that?"

Tom sat back and shook his head. "No, I never

think about that at all," he said sarcastically. "I'm just a selfish jerk and I've never done one nice thing for you—or anyone else."

Tracy started to cry. "You don't understand."

"You're right about that," he said.

"It's all such a mess," she moaned.

"What happened, Tracy? I know I've been real busy with football lately, but I thought you understood. You've been busy, too. And as for the sex.... Well, I thought you liked it. You should've told me if you didn't."

"It's not that I don't like it." She wiped her eyes on her sleeve and sniffed. How can I explain? she wondered. Everything I say comes out wrong. I should have said something before, and now it's just before the big game. Great timing, Tracy.

"Well, what is it then?"

"It's so complicated," she said, "and maybe this isn't the best time to talk about it."

"Well, you've started. You might as well finish."

"No.... I'm sorry I brought it up. This isn't a good time."

"Hey, what am I supposed to think? I don't even know if you still love me. I don't know if you ever did!"

"Well, if you don't know, that's *your* prob-

lem." She pushed the door open, slammed it behind her and ran up the path to the house.

Turn to page 137.

continued from p. 117

Tom rummaged through his notes from health class. Somewhere there had to be some scrap of information that would help him. "Use a condom *every* time" caught his eye. Did I write that? he wondered. Too bad I didn't follow my own advice. He read through the rest of his notes, then flung them down with a groan. Now he was even more convinced that he had an STD. I've got to get it taken care of, he thought. But how? As he bent to gather the papers from the floor, his attention was drawn to a phone number scrawled casually in the margin of one page:

1-800-227-8922/STD Hotline.

Snatching up the page, he stumbled into the kitchen and grabbed the phone. Thank goodness his folks were out and Travis and Jenny were absorbed in a *Star Trek* rerun.

"STD Hotline. This is Art. May I help you?"

"I hope so," said Tom with deep feeling. "I think I might have something and I...I don't know what to do."

"Do you believe you were exposed to an STD?" Art asked.

"I don't know. Maybe. I have...well, I have these...symptoms." Tom haltingly described what he was experiencing.

"I see," said Art. "Well, what you've described sounds like something that's easy to cure. You haven't been to a doctor or a clinic, I take it?"

"No. I don't know where to go, and well, it's an embarrassing thing to go around asking about."

"Yes, it can be embarrassing. But you need to be seen by someone who can help you. If you'll tell me where you live, I can give you the name of the nearest clinic. You should get treatment as soon as possible."

Tom told him the name of the town and state he lived in and in a few moments Art came back on the line. "There's a clinic in your town. Do you have a pencil and paper?"

Tom wrote down the address and phone number. "Do you know how much it's going to cost?" he asked.

"Don't worry about cost," Art assured him. "You only pay what you can afford. If you can't afford anything, that's okay too."

"Oh good."

"There are a couple of things you can do to keep from passing on what you have," Art added. "One is to abstain from sex until you are sure your infection is cured and the other is to notify any recent sexual partners about your symptoms. They could be infected without knowing it."

"Okay," said Tom. "That sounds reasonable."

"Do you have any other questions?"

"Um...well, I was wondering...if I go there, will they call my parents or anything?"

"No," said Art. "Your privacy is protected by law."

"I guess I'd better get over there then," Tom said.

"Sounds like a plan. And as far as the future is concerned, I'll be glad to answer any questions you have about preventing STDs."

"I don't think I have any questions," Tom replied. "I know I should've used a condom. Thanks for your help."

"You're welcome. Good luck to you."

Tom dialed the clinic number. "We're open until nine tonight," the receptionist said. "Would you like to come in this evening?"

At dinner Tom asked if he could have the car to go to the library. "I've got to look up some stuff for an English paper," he said.

"When's it due?" asked his dad.

"What's it about?" asked his mom. He found himself creating an assignment on the spur of the moment.

I wish it really was an English paper, he mut-

tered to himself as he pulled into the clinic parking lot. Anything would be better than this.

Once inside the clinic, however, things weren't as bad as he'd expected.

Turn to page 143.

continued from p. 132

The locker room was tropically warm, but outside the temperature was rapidly falling to below freezing. Tom jogged out to join his teammates on the field as the players' names were announced. I hope I get to play the whole game, he thought as he stood with his shivering teammates. If anyone sits on the bench too long, he'll freeze to death. I wonder if Tracy's here, he thought, scanning the crowd. Impossible to tell. Cut it out, he warned himself. You said you weren't going to think about her. You're going to concentrate on the game.

"Hey!" Zack punched his arm. "You coming?"

Tom stared at Zack for a moment, then looked around. Almost everyone else had left the field. "Uh, sure," he said, following the rest of the team to the sidelines. It was time to start the game.

THE END

continued from p. 117

When Mr. Johnson got home from work that evening, Tom waited for the chance to talk to him. He could barely sit still at dinner. When they finished eating, his father headed to his desk to work on his computer. Tom started to follow him, but his mother stopped him.

"Not so fast there, mister."

"What, Mom?"

"You'd better get the dishes done before you get involved in something else. It's your night."

"Aww, no. I really don't feel very good."

"I know. The thought of washing dishes makes me sick too."

Travis chipped in his two cents worth. "Tough luck, Tom. Hee hee."

"Wait a minute, Trav. Do 'em for me, okay. I'll pay you."

"How much?"

"Two bucks."

"Uh uh. Five."

"Be reasonable, will you? Three."

"I'll do it for four."

"Okay, you win. What a greedy kid you are."

"Up front."

"Geez!" Tom dug in his pocket. "Got change for a five?"

"I'll owe it to you," said Travis, snapping up the bill.

Mrs. Johnson left the room, shaking her head. "I don't believe it," she muttered. "Four dollars! Why, when I was a kid...."

Tom poked his head into his parents' bedroom where his dad was working. A steady tap, tap, tap came from the keyboard.

"Dad?"

T.J. Johnson looked up questioningly.

"Can I talk to you?"

Something in Tom's voice caught his father's full attention. He swiveled around in his desk chair. "What is it, Tom? Sit down."

Tom closed the door and sat on the edge of the bed.

"What's up?" Mr. Johnson inquired.

"I don't quite know how to say this. I've been going over and over it in my mind...and... well...."

His father looked alarmed.

"It's...well, it's just that I think I have some kind of disease...you know, a sexual thing. I've been feeling pretty bad lately."

Mr. Johnson relaxed slightly. "What are your

symptoms?"

"Well, it hurts when I pee and there's this stuff that comes out of my penis."

"Sounds like a problem, all right." He looked at his son sympathetically. "We'd better get you to a doctor. How long has this been going on?"

"About a week, I guess."

"A week? Why didn't you say something sooner?"

"Well, I was hoping it would go away. Plus I was embarrassed."

"This could be serious stuff, Tom. A little embarrassment shouldn't keep you from getting the medical care you need."

"I know. I'm sorry." He felt like crying. All the tension of the past few weeks was coming to a head.

His dad got up and came to sit beside him. "I'm going to spare you a lecture for now. I'm sure what you're experiencing is worth more than a thousand words anyway. I'm going to see what your mom thinks. Maybe there's a clinic that's open nights and we could take you right now."

"Does Mom have to know?"

"Hey! She is your mother, after all. She has a right to know about your health. Our first priority is to get you well. We'll have time later to talk about your behavior."

"We'd better get you to a doctor."

His father left the room and Tom lay back on his parents' bed. He wiped his eyes with the edge of a pillow case. He felt bad physically and he was scared about going to a clinic. But he also felt relief.

Mr. Johnson came back into the bedroom. "Get your jacket, son," he said softly. "There's a clinic open downtown." He leaned over and switched off the computer.

Go to the next page.

continued from p. 136 or 142

The people at the clinic were courteous and friendly. Tom filled out some forms and answered questions about his sex life. He had a brief physical exam and they took samples of his urine and the discharge from his penis. Afterwards he sat down to talk with the clinic worker, Joyce Nomura.

Ms. Nomura told him he had an infection of the urethra which was probably either chlamydia or gonorrhea. She said they would have the results of the laboratory test in about three days. In the meantime Tom was to take a medication that would start clearing up his symptoms. She also told him that it was essential for him to talk to anyone he'd had sex with recently. She said it was possible for someone to have an STD and not know it.

"These diseases can be especially dangerous if they're not treated," she said. "They can cause serious damage and make it difficult or impossible for a woman to get pregnant or for a man to become a father."

"And if she's on birth control pills, it doesn't protect her?"

"Not at all. You have to use a condom, preferably with a spermicide. They're easy to get, to

carry around, and to use." She smiled and added, "Of course you do have to *use* them."

Tom called Cassie as soon as he got home. At first she thought he was joking. Then she said she felt fine—Tom must have gotten it from someone else.

"There *isn't* anyone else," he insisted. "It's been too long since I was with Tracy. Please go get checked. They said it can be real dangerous for a woman if she doesn't get treated."

Cassie finally promised she'd go to the clinic. It was a good thing, too, because it turned out they both had chlamydia, a common sexually transmitted disease. They started taking antibiotic pills at once. Tom was to take them for a week and then return for a check up. Cassie needed treatment for a longer time because the disease had spread further. The doctor was optimistic though; he didn't think there would be any permanent damage.

Go to the next page.

continued from p. 115 or 144

In the days that followed, Tom was glad to be feeling healthy again, although the infection was still not completely cured and he was still taking medication. He played football with a renewed enthusiasm that pleased the coach and his teammates. It was just two weeks until the big game with King High. The only thing Tom wasn't happy about was the guilty feeling he had around Tracy. He'd agreed to go to her house that Saturday. Her parents were out and she was babysitting her younger sister. As he drove over, he tried to talk himself out of his anxiety. Just relax, he told himself. Things are good between you now, so don't be so uptight. She's not going to find out about anything, anyway.

A few minutes later he was settled in front of the TV with Tracy and Tanya and a big bowl of popcorn. Tracy was in a playful mood, tickling and nuzzling him. He tickled her too and then Tanya joined in. Soon the three of them were rolling on the floor, a tangle of arms and legs and squeals.

"Oops, there goes the popcorn," cried Tracy. "C'mon, Tom, stop! I give up, okay? Tanya! Get off me. We've got to clean up this mess."

They spent the next fifteen minutes picking popcorn kernels out of the rug, then collapsed again to watch the Saturday night movie. Tracy sat on the sofa with her feet propped on the coffee table and Tom sprawled across the sofa with his head in her lap. Tanya stretched out on the floor with a pillow under her head. Tom smiled as Tracy stroked his hair or bent to kiss the tip of his nose.

Soon, Tanya fell asleep. "Let me up," Tracy said. "I'll put her to bed."

Tom sat up. "Want some help?"

"No. She's too big to carry anyway. I'll have to wake her up a little so she can walk." She bent and shook her sister's shoulder. "C'mon Tanya, wake up. Let's go to bed. Get up now—that's a girl."

While Tracy was getting Tanya settled, Tom made more popcorn. He was sitting on the sofa, absorbed in the movie and munching contentedly when Tracy returned.

"Alone at last," she sighed, sinking down beside him and leaning against his shoulder.

He put his arm around her, but continued to stare at the screen. After a while, Tracy slipped

her arms around Tom's neck. Her breath tickled his ear.

"Hey, c'mon, Trace," he protested, "I want to watch this part."

Tracy pulled away and folded her arms across her chest. "Excuse me for bothering you."

"This is a good movie."

She shook her head. "I never thought I'd see the day."

"What day?"

"When you'd be more interested in a stupid movie than in me."

"I'm interested in you, babe. I just wanted to watch this. Why are you making such a big deal of it?" He pulled her close and kissed her hair. "Let's just watch the rest of the movie, okay?"

Tracy sighed and relaxed against him. "Okay.... But I still think you've been acting weird lately."

When Tom got to health class on Monday, Tracy and Christy were at their desks. Neither one would look at him. Now what? he wondered. All through class, he worried. What if Tracy had found out about his night with Cassie? If she did,

I'm dead meat, he thought miserably.

As he stared unseeing at the page in front of him, he was dimly aware of a sound trying to penetrate his awareness. He looked around. The entire class was looking at him.

Mrs. Diaz was standing above him, a questioning look in her eye. Someone snickered.

"Oh, sorry," he said. "I was thinking about something else."

"We were talking about communication," said the teacher. "I was wondering if you could name some of the aspects of good communication."

"Oh. Let me think...."

"I'll give you a hint. You just gave us a demonstration of one aspect. Or rather, the lack of one aspect."

"Oh yeah. I know. Is it listening?"

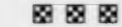
Mrs. Diaz smiled and nodded and the class cracked up. Even Tracy smiled a little, Tom noted. He tried to pay attention from then on.

When the bell rang, Tracy approached Tom. "Speaking of communication," she said, "we've got to talk."

He nodded miserably. She knows something, he thought.

"I'll meet you after practice," she said.

"Okay," he tried unsuccessfully to smile. "See you there."



Tom waited outside the gym. The air was cold and the sky threatening. Tracy jogged up beside him. Her complexion was rosy but her eyes were somber.

"You want to walk to my house?" he suggested. "I can give you a ride home from there."

She nodded silently. After a couple of blocks, she spoke. "Something's going on."

He waited.

"I know I was hard to get along with for a while. But then I thought we'd worked things out. So when you started acting sort of weird I thought maybe it was just my imagination or something. But after Serena told me about the English paper, I started to put two and two together. Now I *know* there's something going on."

"Wait a minute. What did Serena tell you?"

"It was last night. I called her up and I was complaining about my creative writing class 'cause we have a paper due every week. Then she said that in her English Lit class—which is also *your* class—it's mostly reading and quizzes. She said there's going to be one big term paper at the end. So I said, 'Didn't you have a paper due last Monday?' And she said, 'If we did nobody told me.' So I said, 'Tom told me there was a

paper.' And so on. You get the idea, right?"

Tom gave himself a hard mental kick. I should have remembered that Serena was in my English class, he thought.

"What's going on? What were you doing when you told me you were working on the paper? When you said you were at the library? Who were you talking to when I tried to call you? Why did you pull away from me the other night?" Her voice rose. "Is there somebody else, or do you just not care anymore, or what?"

Now what do I do? Tom thought. She'll never believe it if I try to bluff my way through. But how can I tell her what's really going on? She's so mad already, she'll probably kill me. Actually, he reflected, I wish she would—at least I'd be out of this misery. Maybe I should just tell her everything—lay it all out on the line—and hope for the best. Still, the thought of telling Tracy that he'd had sex with someone else made him sick to his stomach.

What did Tom do?

Choice Point 10A

If you think Tom decided
to tell Tracy the truth

turn to page 152.

Choice Point 10B

If you think Tom decided
to avoid the truth

turn to page 157.

continued from p. 151

Fat drops of rain began to spatter around them. Tom didn't know if the wet streaks on Tracy's face were from the rain or from her eyes. There was a covered bus shelter just ahead.

"Come on," Tom said. "Let's get out of this."

Fortunately there was no one waiting for the bus. They sat down on the bench. Tracy kept about a foot of distance between them. She acts like I've got a disease or something, Tom thought. Then he remembered. He chuckled bitterly to himself.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing's funny, believe me."

They sat in silence for a while. "Well?" She turned to look at him.

Tom took a deep breath. I'd rather be eyeball to eyeball with King's biggest, meanest running back than do what I'm about to do, he thought. "I don't blame you one bit for being mad," he began.

She waited.

"I've been covering up something, you're right. But it's not what you think. There isn't anybody else. At least...."

Her wide, dark eyes gazed steadily at him.

He tried again. "Remember when we weren't

seeing each other last month?"

"How could I forget?"

"Well, I went to this party with Zack, see. At Nicole's."

"I heard about that party. I didn't know you were there."

"Well, I was. I only went 'cause Zack talked me into it. I wasn't in the mood for partying or anything. I just kept hoping you'd call. But anyway, you didn't. So I went to Nicole's and well.... Do you remember Cassie Murray? I used to go with her in tenth grade?"

Tracy nodded.

"Well, she was there. She goes to King now. Anyway it was good to see her. She's real nice. You'd like her, I'm sure."

Tracy glared at him. "I'm sure."

"Okay. So I was feeling really down—because of us, you know. And Cassie was feeling super bad because her boyfriend left her for someone else and, well, I had a couple of beers...." His voice trailed off.

"Go on."

"Well, we ended up on the sofa, and one thing sort of led to another thing."

"*What* other thing."

"We had sex. I'm really sorry about it now, but that's what happened."

"Do you love her?" Tracy asked softly.

"No, I don't love her. I like her. I used to love her, I guess. I love *you,* Tracy, don't you see? Having to hide this from you has been tearing me apart."

She shook her head slowly. Her face was pale and she shivered. "I still don't get it," she said. "If you were...uh...with her...at Nicole's party, why the big lie about an English paper? Why the stories about going to the library and all of that? Are you still seeing her or what?"

"No, I'm not still seeing her. But there's another part to all this." He couldn't look at her.

"Another part?"

He nodded miserably.

"Come on, Tom, just get it over with. I can't take much more of this."

"The reason I've been avoiding you is because I got something. An STD. I've been taking pills for it but I still have to get checked at the clinic. I just didn't want to have to do any explaining about it."

"You mean you had sex with Cassie one time and you caught a disease from her?"

"Yeah. She didn't know she had it. She didn't feel sick or anything. We figure she must've gotten it from her boyfriend and he got it from the girl he met on his summer vacation."

"So if we'd made love the other night, I would've been the next in line?"

"Well, that's what I was worried about. I didn't want to spread it around."

"Didn't you and Cassie use anything?"

He shook his head.

"Tom Johnson, I don't believe you." She leaned back and heaved a sigh. "Boy, I don't know what to think."

He reached over and squeezed her hand. "For what it's worth, I'm sorry."

She pulled her hand away. "I guess I need some time to think," she said.

"Does that mean you're not necessarily going to kick me out?"

"I don't know. I'm super mad at you, and I feel awful."

He waited.

"But I know it was partly my fault that you went to that party. I *was* being cold to you and it wasn't your fault. I was just so confused and moody.... Still, when I think of you with someone else, I feel sick. It makes my skin hurt, it even makes my hair hurt."

"I know. I'd feel the same way."

She looked over at Tom. "I guess you've probably been suffering some yourself."

"That's for sure."

"Does it...hurt? Has it been real bad?"

"Bad enough."

A bus pulled up then and let off a frazzled-looking woman pulling a small boy in a yellow raincoat. The bus driver looked at Tom and Tracy. Tom shook his head and the bus went on.

"It looks like the rain's letting up," he noted. "Maybe we should make a run for it." In front of them, the little boy scampered, leaping from one puddle to another, while the woman struggled to keep up.

Tom and Tracy shouldered their backpacks and set off at a medium jog toward Tom's house four blocks away. They both smiled as they passed the little boy, a sun-colored splash against the day's dismal chill.

Turn to page 162.

continued from p. 151

"There's not anyone else. You have to believe that."

Fat raindrops were beginning to splatter around them.

"Let's run for it," Tom said. "We can talk when we get to my house."

Tom and Tracy reached his house a few minutes later. Their hair was plastered down and their shoes were soaked through. "Come on in and dry off a little," Tom offered. "Then I'll take you home."

Mrs. Johnson hugged Tracy when she saw her. "It's been a while," she said. "We've missed you around here." Then she took her off to dry her hair and find some dry shoes and socks.

Tracy reappeared a few minutes later. Tom had dried his hair too and put on dry sweats and shoes. "You want to stay and have some hot chocolate?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes, stay," echoed Jennifer, pulling on her sleeve.

Tracy hugged the younger girl's shoulders. "I'd like to, Jenny, but I've got to get home. I've got a lot to do."

In the car the only sounds were the swish of the tires on the watery streets and the scrunch of

the windshield wipers.

Finally Tracy said, "Aren't you going to tell me what's going on?"

"Nothing's going on. I've had some stuff on my mind but it's okay now. I wish you could just trust me and let it go. Everything's okay now."

"Not for me it isn't."

"I'm sorry. I wish you could believe me, Trace. I really love you."

"Well, you've got a weird idea of what love is."

They pulled up in front of her house and she got out. Miserably, he watched her dash up the steps and through the doorway.

Go to the next page.

continued from p. 158

"I don't trust you. I'll never be able to trust you." The words continued to echo in Tom's ears as he crouched on the field and tried to concentrate on the game—the last game of the season—the big game against Rosemont's arch-rival King High.

I can't believe the last few weeks, he thought. Why'd she have to go and find out about Cassie? He didn't think Nicole had told her. It must have been one of Nicole's blabber-mouth friends.

When Tracy had confronted him with the facts of Nicole's party, he'd decided to tell her everything—what happened with Cassie and how he'd discovered he had an STD. What he'd gone through to get cured. He tried to explain how afraid he'd been to tell her about it. He'd been afraid of losing her and now that was exactly what seemed to be happening.

He tried to focus on the game. It was a fourth down for King. He saw the quarterback fading back with the ball, but there didn't seem to be any way to get to him. Zack surged past him on the right, knocking a hole in the line. That's my hole, Tom thought, too late. I should be in there.

The pass was perfect—and complete. An 18 yard gain for King. Mercifully, the second

quarter drew to a close.

I wonder if Tracy's here, Tom thought as he jogged off the field.

He glanced at the Rosemont cheering section and shook his head. She wouldn't come, not after what she'd said.

Above him, from the midst of the restless crowd, Tracy stared down at Tom's pale, strained face. He looks terrible, she thought, and he's playing horribly. She felt tears forming in her eyes as she watched the team head toward the locker room.

After the halftime, Rosemont's team emerged with renewed enthusiasm. Even Tom was feeling better after Coach Crowley's pep talk. Maybe there's still hope, he thought, sitting on the bench waiting for the half to begin.

"Tom! Hey, Tom!"

Turning, he spotted Christy waving frantically from the bottom of the bleachers. She was leaning on the barrier that kept the crowd off the football field. He smiled a little and nodded. Then he looked more closely. Someone was with her. That someone raised her hand in a timid wave and smiled hesitatingly.

It was like the sun coming out. Tom felt warmed even though a light snow was beginning to fall. He grinned back at Tracy and gave her a

thumbs-up sign. All right! he said to himself. I guess the game's not over yet.

THE END

continued from p. 123 or 156

A light snow had begun to fall, muffling the cheers and jeers from the bleachers and turning the muddy field, temporarily at least, into a vast, white carpet.

It was the last quarter of the last game—the big game with Rosemont's arch-rival King High. As the team broke from the huddle, Tom reflected that it had been a tough game—tougher than they'd expected. But in the last quarter Rosemont had a comfortable lead. The score was 27 to 16. Still, with six minutes remaining on the clock, anything could happen.

Something did happen. King managed to get the ball away from Rosemont and score a field goal. At 27 to 19 the margin was getting scary. One touchdown and a two-point conversion by King would tie the game.

Tom focused his total attention on the ball as King prepared for an on-side kick. Unfortunately, the kick was perfect—fast and low. Keeping an eye on the advancing players, Tom moved swiftly to the ball's expected place of impact. As Rosemont moved forward, the ball struck the slushy ground and bounced crazily as the frantic players tried to recover it. The ball veered toward Tom and he flung himself forward to grasp

it. Then something hit him like a locomotive. When he managed to get back on his feet, King had the ball. It was snowing harder now and the icy slush ran down his back.

Despite the best efforts of Rosemont's defense, King advanced past the goal line. From his position behind the five-yard line, Tom watched as King prepared to run the ball for the two-point conversion that would tie the game. But it won't, Tom told himself. We've got to stop them. We will.

Scoping out the offense, he saw that the number two halfback's left leg seemed to be angled toward him. At the snap Tom lunged toward his opposing tackle, but his attention was focused on the ball-carrying back. He brushed aside his charging counterpart as if he weren't even there. When he spotted Tom coming through the line, the halfback swerved sharply to avoid him. Fearing he was about to lose his quarry, Tom dove desperately at his legs.

The roar of the Rosemont fans was deafening. Tom lay on the freezing field, thinking he'd never been happier. He'd always treasure the memory of the halfback's squirming leg in his grasp.

Zack came over and pulled him to his feet. "You should see yourself, Johnson," he said. "You really are a disgusting mess."

Tom grinned. "You're not going to win any beauty contests yourself."

For the remaining few minutes of the game, Rosemont held on to the ball, playing conservatively while the clock ran out. The snow had stopped, but the air was still bitter cold, the ground frozen, and the team dog-tired.

When the gun went off there was pandemonium on the field. The Rosemont team jumped up and down and hollered. They pounded and hugged each other. King's players even shook their hands. "Good game," they said.

Tracy spotted Tom in a knot of enthusiastic fans. She pushed and elbowed her way through to him. He grabbed her and lifted her off her feet. She held him around the head and laughed with delight.

"You were great," she yelled. "I loved it. I love you."

"You're the great one," he said lowering her and kissing her nose. He brushed at her coat. "Now I got you all muddy."

"It doesn't matter."

With their arms around each other, surrounded by cold, wet, happy friends, Tom and Tracy slowly made their way toward the gym.

"I can't believe it," Tracy said. "Football season's over."

"I can't believe it," Tracy said. "Football season's over."

Tom kissed the top of her head. "But everything else is just beginning," he said.

THE END

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About the Author

Christine DeVault, an educational writer and former secondary school teacher, has authored or coauthored numerous middle school, high school and college texts, including six interactive books for Network Publications. With her husband Bryan Strong she is coauthor of *The Marriage and Family Experience*, a leading college textbook.

Step into the lives of Tom and Tracy, R
mont High seniors. After dating for ne
year, Tom and Tracy learn first-hand
their choices about sexual involvemen
clude making decisions about protec
themselves from sexually transmitted
ease. Their story directly involves you
cause you make decisions for them.

Tom watched Tracy from the corner of his eye
walked. I wonder what she's thinking, he tho
wonder if she wants me as much as I want her.
make love soon? Should I get some condoms
does she expect?

This would be a perfect time to talk abou
things, Tom thought. We're alone and we have
time. But maybe she'll think I'm rushing things.
should I do?

What did Tom do?

Choice Point 1A

If you think Tom decided to talk with Tracy abou
prepared for sex, turn to page 15.

Choice Point 1B

If you think Tom decided *not* to talk to Tracy, turn
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